

THE OTHER MCGOVERN ■ CONGRESS DISCOVERS THE BORDER

JANUARY 30, 2006

The American Conservative

All the President's Power

**Executive
Overreach
From TR
to Bush**



GREEK VS. GEEK

The recent caricature in *The American Conservative* (Dec. 19) of my book by one Gary Brecher is not just a mishmash of factual errors but unhinged and, sadly, nothing new. The author writes as the “War Nerd” for *The Exile*, “a Moscow-based alternative newspaper,” and has been publishing the same hate-filled drivel for some time.

Consider the most recent (July 2005) attack entitled, “Victor Hanson: Portrait of an American Traitor—The War Nerd puts local Fresno academic Victor Hanson (Doctor Victor Hanson) on trial and recommends the firing squad.” In that rant, laced with profanities and hatred, self-described Fresno-resident Brecher went on to suggest arson in addition to bullets: “That column got me so furious I daydreamed about driving down Highway 99 to Hanson’s farm and setting all his orchards and vineyards on fire. I kept thinking of what the Spartans said when one of their neighbors threatened them: ‘Your cicadas will chirp from the ground,’ meaning, ‘We’ll burn your f---ing olive orchards if you mouth off again.’”

About the same time as that earlier tirade was published, our roadside vineyard was in fact set on fire by an act of vandalism and was put out by the local Mid-Valley Fire Department—a fact brought to the attention of the editor of the Moscow-based newspaper.

A War Like No Other—the title comes from Thucydides—has been reviewed in some 30 journals and newspapers, by both conservatives and liberals, classicists and generalists, and the assessment of the book is a matter of record. Given past criticism from *The American Conservative*, I would expect an ideological attack on the book, but the choice of this reviewer reaches a new low.

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON
via e-mail

Gary Brecher replies:

I can’t believe Professor V.D. Hanson dragged himself away from Cheney’s Christmas ham to whine like a girly-man about my review of his book. And to accuse me of setting fire to his Fresno winery. It gave me a good laugh, but then again, I’m not sure how funny it is that someone this paranoid is so adored by the current administration. From what I hear, Scooter Libby considered Hanson to be his guru. It all makes sense in a scary sort of way.

Hanson’s letter is so weird and rambling it took me a while to get his point. Then it hit me like a diamond bullet: my review of his book ruined his Christmas holiday. There’s no pleasing some people.

Funny thing is, Hanson never answers a single one of my points. Instead he rambles about a War Nerd column from two millennia ago. Kind of makes me wonder if I got to him in that article too.

I said that not one single phrase from Hanson’s new book makes sense, and I stick by that. So here’s an open challenge: if you, Victor Davis Hanson, can explain what the hell you were talking about in the following sentence, please enlighten me. Make my Peloponnesian day, dude: “We [Americans], like the Athenians, are all-powerful, but insecure, professedly pacifist yet nearly always in some sort of conflict, often more desirous of being liked than being respected, and proud of our arts and letters even as we are more adept at war.”

DIFFERENT COLOR, DIFFERENT STANDARD?

I have been actively following your magazine’s commentary on multiculturalism and Muslim immigration in Europe. As an ardent supporter of immigrants and a self-conscious Polish-Jewish-American, I have found your emphasis on the assimilation and the adoption of native culture by immigrants to be an interesting perspective that I have not heard enough of.

Westerners like myself who revere the “immigrant experience” should temper our romantic view with the difficult reality of unassimilated ghettos and the anti-Western animosity felt by some modern immigrants. We cannot have the functional multiethnic society we desire if all groups within it are not citizens first and ethnics second.

That said, I am concerned about an omission in the most recent issues of *TAC*. You covered the riots by the Muslim underclass in France and used them to show the threat that immigrants pose to Western identity. Recently, another riot broke out in Australia, smaller in scale but similar in spirit, and equal in its threat to national identity. Thousands of Australian youths rioted against the Muslim minority, beating and screaming racial slurs at innocent citizens. Where is your outrage? Are you such defenders of Western culture that you will ignore the same bestial behavior you condemn among the Muslims? I thought you defended Anglo and Western traditions of civic and personal responsibility. Your silence makes it seem that you are more interested in defending the Anglo ethnicity than the ideals—which wouldn’t separate you much from Muslim rioters in Paris.

BRIAN MILAKOVSKY
Somerville, Maine

KUDOS TO KAUFFMAN

Wonderful article by Bill Kauffman (“Free Vermont,” Dec. 19): I have an implicit respect for someone who can use “rebarbative,” “elsetimes,” and “eidolon” in a single article.

TERRY HULSEY
Fort Worth, Texas

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EXIT, DON'T ESCALATE

On Jan. 2, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested much that during his December visit, CIA Director Porter Goss did not—as had been reported—request overflight rights or intelligence assistance for a possible attack on Iran.

“These speculations based on the claim that the U.S. asked for military base from Turkey to attack some neighbor countries are not true,” the statement read. “Turkey defends the view that problems should be solved through dialogue and negotiation, our region doesn’t need new problems and that everybody should fulfill his/her obligations in that regard.”

Problem is, the Bush administration still presumes a mandate to make the world safe for democracy, and Israel won’t rest easy as long as Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad preaches that it should be “wiped off the map.” Add Iran’s announcement that it will resume nuclear-fuel research and its heavy hints that it will reject the Russian compromise aimed at defusing international concerns about uranium enrichment, and the table is set.

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist writes, “Iran’s mullahs have waged a 26-year campaign to suppress dissent, support terror and pursue a nuclear weapons program. ... The U.S. needs to act before a regime that denied the real Holocaust unleashes another.” Soon we’ll be hearing what a cakewalk it will be to collect the flowers strewn before us in Tehran.

Iran is playing a dangerous game. But so too is the U.S. Democratizing has proved a costly hobby, and a showdown with Iran—in addition to exacting an incalculable toll all its own—would only deepen our Iraqi woes by rallying the Shi’ites against us.

Now is the time for exit, not escalation. America’s own allies have had secret weapons programs—Israel tops



the list—while Iran still adheres to the letter of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. And while Ahmadinejad should not expect a call from the Nobel committee, he’s no Saddam. If we find a war here, it will be because we went looking for one.

[POSTWAR]

LANDSLIDE AHMAD

Elections work differently in the world’s youngest democracy, where getting thrown out of office is no obstacle to power. Don’t blame the voters—in the Dec. 15 elections, Iraqis tried to rid themselves of Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Chalabi. With 95 percent of ballots tallied, Chalabi had won just 0.36 percent of the vote in Baghdad. In Basra, where his fellow Shi’ites are a majority, he fared even worse, scoring 0.34 percent. The at-large Iraqi voters overseas or in prisons, hospitals, or the army liked him enough to give him nearly nine-tenths of a percent.

But that didn’t stop Chalabi from becoming Iraq’s oil minister—one of the most powerful posts in the country—before the New Year was rung in. Ostensibly it’s an interim appointment, until the new parliament, *sans* Chalabi, convenes. But speculation abounds that Ahmad the Thief will yet find a way to keep his position. “I object to the decision of putting me on leave and the mechanism by which it was done,” said

outgoing Oil Minister Ibrahim al-Uloun before resigning. The people of Iraq might well object too—but then, they’ve already had their say.

[BELTWAY]

BORDERING ON ENFORCEMENT

Christmas came early for the majority of Americans who are tired of the sieve-like nature of their country’s borders. On Dec. 16, the House of Representatives passed the strongest immigration-enforcement bill to advance on Capitol Hill in some time.

The House voted to build a 700-mile security fence, with lights and cameras, along the southwestern border and to direct the Department of Homeland Security to study erecting similar barriers in the north. The legislation also establishes a mandatory system for verifying employees’ legal status. Local law enforcement gains new powers to arrest and detain illegal aliens. Eligibility requirements for federal immigration benefits are tightened, and loopholes that prevent thorough background checks closed. Thanks to an amendment supported by 57 Democrats, the Diversity Visa Lottery would also be repealed.

Just as important, the House didn’t approve amnesty in any form. Even non-binding language recommending the eventual adoption of a guest-workers program was rejected. An amendment

to cut the maximum sentence for illegal entry and presence to just six months failed. This bill is enforcement-only.

In February, the action moves to the Senate, where there is nothing comparable to Tom Tancredo's Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus. Open-borders interest groups are counting on senators to attach a guest-workers program and otherwise dilute the bill's enforcement provisions, setting the stage for the conference committee to produce a much weaker final version.

[CULTURE]

MOGADISHU, MASS.

All is not onward and upward with the 90 Somali refugees in the Springfield, Massachusetts school system. Last month the *New York Times* did an inquiry. One Somali fourth grader, two years in the United States, could not read the words "for" and "horse." His sister, a ninth grader, could not read a word of her history book. An eighth-grade Somali in his second year in the school's English immersion class could not meaningfully speak or understand any English. The *Times* failed to find one instance of a Somali who was advancing in school and successfully integrating.

The *Times* implies that the difficulties are due to the Springfield school board's failure to provide a Somali language bilingual-education program, which would have been mandatory before Massachusetts voters abandoned bilingual education three years ago. (The schools do provide two Somali translators who travel from school to school for the entire district.) Others say the Somalis would do better if they could be clustered in the same school—but that recourse would bring the school's test scores down and perhaps render it failing under the No Child Left Behind law.

It's a dilemma: for the Somalis who are growing up in a new country without the most rudimentary language skills,

for the school board of a city facing bankruptcy, for the school administrators now facing lawsuits after being handed an intractable problem.

We're not sure whether the agency that sponsored the Somali settlement—Jewish Family Services of Western Massachusetts in this case, but church sponsorship of exotic refugees is widespread nationally and altogether ecumenical—anticipated these difficulties. But it does seem logical that groups that believe America is an appropriate place to settle the world's refugees should not be exempt from helping to solve the problems generated by their broad-mindedness. It's not as if the Springfield taxpayers were consulted about bringing a Somali tribe into their midst—though, clearly, they should have been.

[NUMBERS]

DISGRUNTLED GRUNTS

The latest Military Times poll of armed forces personnel shows the president's popularity, while still significantly higher than among the general public, is slipping.

According to the magazine group, "In 2003 and 2004, supporters of the war in Iraq pointed to high approval ratings in the Military Times poll as a signal that military members were behind ... the president's policy." But 2005's results "found diminished optimism that US goals in Iraq can be accomplished, and a somewhat smaller drop in support for the decision to go to war in 2003."

Backing for Bush's overall policies fell 11 points, and support for Bush on Iraq is down to 54 percent. Sixty-one percent of respondents served in Iraq or Afghanistan; nearly two-thirds believe our military is stretched too thin. Iraq War enthusiasts often argue that supporting our troops necessitates supporting the Bush administration's policies. Someone forgot to tell the servicemen themselves. ■

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Russian Roulette

No issue did more to bring Ronald Reagan to power than the failed policy of détente, the absurdity of which was revealed when Russia invaded Afghanistan as

Carter fretted over hostages at the embassy in Tehran.

Among Reagan's first moves was to abort a British-German plan to finance a new gas pipeline from Russia to NATO Europe, which would have garnered Moscow \$8 billion in annual hard currency and left NATO as dependent on Russian gas as Europe is today.

The wisdom of the Gipper was on display this New Year's, as Vladimir Putin cut off gas to Ukraine and Kiev siphoned off Russian gas headed for Europe. Instantly, the supplies on which EU industries from Italy to the Baltic depend fell by 20, 30, and 40 percent.

Howls across Europe caused Putin to back down. He turned the gas back on for Ukraine, pressure in the pipelines rose, and gas began to flow again to the factories of Europe. But for a brief moment, the vulnerability of Europe was exposed. Russia has the power to shut the continent down and cause European peoples to freeze to death in the dark. This is a power over Europe as great as if one Islamic regime controlled the Persian Gulf.

Putin is being portrayed as the heavy for hiking the price of natural gas for Ukraine from \$50 per 1,000 cubic feet to \$230, which is near the world market price. But Putin has a case. That \$50 price is a subsidy, a gift from Moscow, though Kiev wishes to break out of Russia's orbit and join the EU and a NATO that squats on the doorstep of Mother Russia.

Russia is behaving as great powers always do. When Castro pulled Cuba out

of America's orbit, the United States cut off sugar purchases and imposed an embargo that endures to this day. As we give foreign aid to some nations and deny others access to our markets, Putin plays hardball, too. Moreover, as a condition of membership in the WTO, Russia is under pressure to permit oil and gas prices to rise to market levels. And this is overdue, as the waste of subsidized oil and gas in Russia is scandalous.

This dramatic episode points up the absurdity of pushing NATO to the borders of the old Soviet Union and into the Baltic republics. How exactly would our military rescue Estonia or Ukraine in a confrontation, if Moscow's weapon of choice were to cut all oil and natural gas in the dead of winter? Europe would be screaming for us to end the crisis, and the nations we had set out to rescue would suffer more resisting Russia than from appeasing Russia.

Moving NATO eastward and interfering in the internal affairs of the old Soviet republics to wean them away from Moscow has been a failed policy. Why overthrow a friend in Georgia in the name of democracy if the result is to alienate and antagonize the largest nation on earth, which is an imperiled part of our own civilization?

No greater folly has been committed by President Bush than his midlife conversion to the notion that America was put on this earth to advance some "world democratic revolution" and no non-democrat can be a friend of the United States.

From Louis XVI, who helped us win our Revolution, to Alexander II who sold us Alaska to keep it out of the paws of the British Lion, to Franco in Spain, Diem in Vietnam, Salazar in Portugal, Marcos in the Philippines, and, yes, Pinochet in Chile during the Cold War, this has been true, while democrats like Olof Palme in Sweden, Trudeau in Canada, and Nehru and Krishna Menon in India were often less than useless.

Reagan recognized this. Why can't Bush?

And as we look around the world and see Chavez in Venezuela, Kirchner in Argentina, Morales in Bolivia, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Chirac in France, we note they have two things in common. All either hold power or are advancing to power through free elections, and none has a nice word to say about the United States of George W. Bush.

Russia today is in a desperate condition and may be a dying nation. "Russia's population has plummeted by almost 7% to 143 million in the last 15 years," writes Tom Parfitt of *The Guardian*, "and is predicted to drop by another 20 million by 2025." And as Russia dies, the West dies, too.

As Mexicans reoccupy our Southwest, Muslims and Chinese move north into Russia to recapture lost lands from the 19th century. We have much in common with Russia. We are both sitting in the same leaky boat.

The first order of business of the next administration should be to dump the democratist ideology and start looking out for national interests first. Let us repair relations with Russia and worry a little less over who wins the next election in Turkmenistan. ■

[the men who would be king]

All the President's Power

Contrary to liberal mythology, abuse of executive authority has deep roots in both parties.

By Thomas E. Woods Jr.

VICE PRESIDENT Dick Cheney recently told the *Washington Post* that when the Bush administration entered office, it was determined to reinvigorate the presidency and reverse the steady reduction in executive power and prerogative that had persisted since Watergate. But what reduction could the vice president have had in mind? "The vice president," noted Sen. John E. Sununu (R-N.H.), "may be the only person I know of that believes the executive has somehow lost power over the last 30 years."

Whether or not the vice president was correct in his analysis of the state of the presidency in the year 2000, there can be no question that since then George W. Bush has dramatically expanded the powers of the president—primarily though not exclusively in matters pertaining to the war on terror.

One of the most notorious examples involved the torture of prisoners, a power the administration claimed in the face of law and international agreements to the contrary. "The assertion in the various legal memoranda that the President can order the torture of prisoners despite statutes and treaties forbidding it was another reach for presidential hegemony," wrote Anthony Lewis in the *New York Review of Books*. "The basic premise of the American constitutional system is that those who hold

power are subject to the law Bush's lawyers seem ready to substitute something like the divine right of kings."

Arguably the greatest controversy of all was the revelation at the end of 2005 that the Bush administration had engaged in domestic surveillance without the necessary warrants. James Bamford, author of two books on the National Security Agency, points out the pertinent aspects of what would appear to be the relevant law: the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), passed in 1978. According to Bamford, then-Attorney General Griffin Bell testified before the intelligence committee that FISA acknowledged no "inherent power of the President to conduct electronic surveillance." As Bell himself put it, "This bill specifically states that the procedures in the bill are the exclusive means by which electronic surveillance may be conducted."

In the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, Bush administration officials spoke again and again of the president's inherent powers. But the pertinent statute in this case disclaims any such powers and requires that the president proceed according to the guidelines set out by Congress, which involves securing warrants from a special court. As things stand, the president is claiming a right to engage in surveillance of any American,

unrestrained by any institutional check, in the service of the war on terror—a war that by its very nature must go on indefinitely and, indeed, that we can never really know is truly over.

According to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, the reason the administration did not seek to revise FISA to give the president the clear and unambiguous power to order these wiretaps was that even a Republican Congress would not have gone along. In a Dec. 19 press briefing, the attorney general said, "We have had discussions with Congress in the past—certain members of Congress—as to whether or not FISA could be amended to allow us to adequately deal with this kind of threat, and we were advised that that would be difficult, if not impossible."

The administration's claim, as set forth by the attorney general, is that Congress implicitly agreed to such wiretaps when in the days following Sept. 11 it authorized the use of force against the perpetrators and their allies. Of course, if Congress really had authorized them, it is not clear why it would be so difficult for the administration to persuade Congress to amend FISA accordingly in light of this permission.

Gonzales's argument calls to mind H.L. Mencken's 1937 "Constitution for the New Deal," a satirical rewrite of the

U.S. Constitution, which says of the attorney general, “It shall be his duty to provide legal opinions certifying to the constitutionality of all measures undertaken by the President.”

As the controversy over the wiretapping developed, it was only a matter of time before the “even Lincoln did it” argument would be heard. GOP apologists did not disappoint, reminding Americans that Honest Abe engaged in massive violations of civil liberties while president. But Tom DiLorenzo raises the proper reply to such claims in the form of remarks by Supreme Court Justice David Davis—a personal friend of Lincoln—in the 1866 case *Ex Parte Milligan*: “The constitution of the United States is a law for rulers and people, equally in war and peace, and covers with the shield of its protection all classes of men, at all times, and under all circumstances. No doctrine, involving more pernicious consequences, was ever invented by the wit of man than that any of its provisions can be suspended during any of the great exigencies of government.”

IT WAS THEODORE ROOSEVELT WHO **PIONEERED RULE BY EXECUTIVE ORDER AS A GOVERNING STYLE** AMONG AMERICAN PRESIDENTS.

As DiLorenzo suggests, if the government were to be given *carte blanche* during wartime, all that would be necessary to whittle away the people’s liberties would be to concoct—or to provoke—an endless series of crises.

This is all deeply disturbing, to be sure. But to hear much of the Left tell it, the presidency of George W. Bush is a bizarre aberration in the history of the presidency and more or less *sui generis*. I have no objection to those who describe the Bush presidency as utterly disastrous, and I do not mean to excuse the president by recalling that the ideological and institutional roots of the

imperial presidency extend back at least a century. My point, rather, is that a bit of history can enrich our understanding.

President Rutherford Hayes once warned that although American chief executives had to that point been conservative men wedded both to precedent and to modesty in the exercise of presidential power, a future president committed to concentrating power in his hands could make of the office what he wished. That future president would prove to be Theodore Roosevelt, a figure loved and admired to this day by Left and Right alike.

TR did not merely extend executive prerogative here or there; he put forth a full-fledged philosophy of the presidency that attempted to justify his dramatic expansion of that office. He contended that the president, by virtue of his election by the nation as a whole, possessed a unique claim to be the representative of the entire American people—a position taken by Andrew Jackson during the 1830s and for which he was sharply rebuked by John C. Calhoun.

Each member of the executive branch, but especially the president, “was a steward of the people bound actively and affirmatively to do all he could for the people.” He could, therefore, “do anything that the needs of the nation demanded” unless expressly prohibited in the Constitution. “Under this interpretation of executive power,” TR later reflected, “I did and caused to be done many things not previously done. ... I did not usurp power, but I did greatly broaden the use of executive power.”

Since TR believed himself to be doing the people’s will, and since he believed his own rhetoric that portrayed the pres-

ident as the people’s unique representative in American government, his need to fulfill this special mission overrode concerns about the separation of powers. He remarked privately that in the United States, “as in any nation which amounts to anything, those in the end must govern who are willing actually to do the work of governing; and in so far as the Senate becomes a merely obstructionist body it will run the risk of seeing its power pass into other hands.”

It was TR who pioneered rule by executive order as a governing style among American presidents. Many Americans rightly howled during the 1990s when Bill Clinton’s aide Paul Begala famously said of executive orders, “Stroke of the pen, law of the land. Kinda cool.” But Clinton, who once called Theodore Roosevelt his favorite Republican president, was only exercising a power that TR had made a major feature of the presidential office early in the century.

There are uses of executive orders that are unobjectionable from any standpoint. Thus it was by means of an executive order that George Washington, upon taking office as the first U.S. president, requested that the outgoing government prepare for him a report on the state of the country. A better-known example involves the presidential pardons that President Andrew Johnson issued by means of executive order to ex-Confederates following the Civil War.

There are plenty of examples of the abuse of executive orders as well. As early as 1793, the subject had already led to confrontation between Congress and the president when George Washington declared the United States neutral in the wars of the French Revolution. Congress later ratified the president’s decision, but in the absence of statutory authority or constitutional prerogative, Washington’s action, however

innocuous it seems now, was viewed by some early Americans as an abuse of presidential power.

To appreciate the transformation that occurred in American government under TR, consider the number of executive orders issued by the presidents of the late 19th century. Presidents Hayes and Garfield each issued none. Arthur issued three, Grover Cleveland (first term) six, Benjamin Harrison four, Cleveland (second term) 71, and McKinley 51. TR issued 1,006.

Now, it is true that TR served nearly two terms. But that figure is so much higher than that of his predecessors that it reveals a vastly different philosophy of the presidency from that held by those who preceded him.

To take just one domestic example, TR intervened in the United Mine Workers strike in 1902, ordering the mine owners to agree to arbitration. Should they instead remain obstinate, he threatened to order the Army to take over and operate the coal mines. When informed that no constitutional authorization existed for such a brazen act of confiscation, he replied, "To hell with the Constitution when the people want coal!"

In foreign affairs, an excellent if consistently overlooked example concerns the details of Roosevelt's decision to take over the customs houses in the Dominican Republic. In what has become known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, TR had declared in 1904 that although the United States had no territorial ambitions in this hemisphere, cases of "chronic wrongdoing" on the part of a Latin American country that might invite occupation by a European power would force America's hand. To forestall European occupation, the United States would intervene to restore order and to see that all just claims were satisfied.

When it looked in early 1905 as though one or more European countries

might intervene in the Dominican Republic to recover outstanding debt, Roosevelt put the corollary into effect for the first time by declaring that the United States would administer the Dominican Republic's customs collections to forestall any such foreign intervention.

Here's the part nearly all historians leave out. From the beginning, TR apparently hoped to be able to avoid consulting the Senate at all, even though

ROOSEVELT DEFIED THE SENATE, DRAWING UP WHAT WE WOULD TODAY CALL AN EXECUTIVE AGREEMENT, THE FOREIGN-POLICY EQUIVALENT OF AN EXECUTIVE ORDER.

Senate approval is required to ratify a treaty. The agreement reached with the Dominican Republic was set to take effect Feb. 1, 1905, a mere 11 days after it was signed—obviously too short an interval to allow for Senate discussion or approval.

The president relented and decided to submit the treaty to the Senate after all when he found himself faced with overwhelming opposition, even among his own supporters. Sen. Augustus Bacon objected, "I do not think there can be any more important question than that which involves the consideration of the powers of the President to make a treaty which shall virtually take over the affairs of another government and seek to administer them by this Government, without submitting that question to the consideration and judgment of the Senate." For his part, Sen. Henry Teller added, "I deny the right of the executive department of the Government to make any contract, any treaty, any protocol, or anything of that character which will bind the United States. ... The President has no more right and no more authority to bind the people of the United States by such an agreement than I have as a member of this body."

After the treaty was finally submitted to the Senate, a special session closed without taking a vote on it. Exasperated, Roosevelt simply defied the Senate, drawing up what we would today call an executive agreement, the foreign-policy equivalent of an executive order. Roosevelt later recalled in his autobiography: "I went ahead and administered the proposed treaty anyhow, considering it as a simple agreement on the part of the Executive which could be converted

into a treaty whenever the Senate acted." Two years later the Senate did finally approve a modified version of the treaty. It hardly mattered to TR. "I would have continued it until the end of my term, if necessary," he wrote, "without any action by Congress."

Before TR's accession to power, the last time a matter of real significance had been carried out by means of an executive agreement was the Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817 between Britain and the United States that limited naval armaments on the Great Lakes. But even here, President James Monroe eventually sought the opinion of the Senate as to whether it required ratification; and while that body gave no answer, it did approve the agreement by a two-thirds vote. It fell to TR to convert the executive agreement into a major instrument of American foreign policy.

In 1909, Roosevelt told his son, "I have been a full President right up to the end." He went on: "[W]henever I could establish a precedent for strength in the executive, as I did for instance as regards external affairs in the case of sending the fleet around the world, taking Panama, settling affairs of Santo Domingo and Cuba; or as I did in internal affairs in

settling the anthracite coal strike, in keeping order in Nevada this year when the Federation of Miners threatened anarchy, or as I have done in bringing the big corporations to book—why, in all these cases I have felt not merely that my action was right in itself, but that in showing the strength of, or in giving strength to, the executive, I was establishing a precedent of value.”

Woodrow Wilson, TR’s Democratic opponent in the 1912 presidential race, largely shared TR’s view of the presidency, belying claims then and now that that election represented a titanic conflict of clashing ideologies. Wilson himself admitted his inability to discern any major differences between the two parties, apart from the Republicans’ greater allegiance to the protective tariff.

In *Constitutional Government in the United States*, Wilson described the president in terms that TR could only have cheered:

The nation as a whole has chosen him, and is conscious that it has no other political spokesman. His is the only national voice in affairs. Let him once win the admiration and confidence of the country, and no other single force can withstand him, no combination of forces will easily overpower him. His position takes the imagination of the country. He is the representative of no constituency, but of the whole people. When he speaks in his true character, he speaks for no special interest. If he rightly interpret the national thought and boldly insist upon it, he is irresistible; and the country never feels the zest of action so much as when its President is of such insight and calibre. Its instinct is for unified action, and it craves a single leader.

The president, said Wilson, is “at liberty, both in law and conscience, to be as big a man as he can.”

“Conservatives,” reports historian Arthur Ekirch, “complained of the usurpation of authority by the government and its executive branch” during the Progressive Era. Even one of the presidents during the Progressive Era voiced misgivings: William Howard Taft, a man of sober disposition who was much more at home on the Supreme Court than he ever was as president, vainly warned of this growth in presidential power and of the great difficulty in keeping that power restrained once unleashed. He was swimming against an overwhelming tide.

The danger of the view of the presidency delineated by Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson is not simply that in the name of doing the people’s will the president will disregard the separation of powers or other important institutional restraints. Another peril is that the president may define the people’s will in a self-serving way and then carry out his own agenda in the name of serving the people.

Throughout 2005, for example, President Bush ceaselessly insisted, supposedly on behalf of the American people, that our country would not give in to car bombers, that we would accept nothing less than victory and similar sentiments drawn from the administration’s traditional boilerplate. This in spite of poll numbers that clearly indicated the people’s restlessness about the war and their desire to see Americans withdrawn from Iraq relatively promptly. So on behalf of what “American people” has Bush been speaking? Is he uniquely equipped to divine the “general will” that transcends such crude means of discerning public opinion as actually asking people what they think?

To be sure, the polling data have not always been easy to comprehend and may reflect Americans’ ambivalence about what the United States government should do now that it has involved

itself in Iraq. The point, though, is that this ambivalence certainly precludes sweeping presidential pronouncements about what the American people want and how the chief executive might bring about a swift realization of their desires.

During the 1930s, the ill-fated Ludlow Amendment would have required a national referendum before the nation could be committed to war. (Exceptions were made for outright invasion of American soil.) President Franklin Roosevelt was staunchly, even furiously, opposed. Once again, the president, who arrogates to himself the responsibility of carrying out the will of the people, turned out to be relatively blasé about finding out their actual opinions.

The very initiation of the war in Iraq constituted a breathtaking exercise of presidential power but one that has grown so common that it is hardly even noticed or commented upon any longer except by the occasional isolated constitutionalist. Until 1950, when Harry Truman committed American troops to Korea without a declaration of war from Congress, it was generally understood that the intent of the Constitution’s framers had been that while the president, in his capacity as commander in chief, would direct American wars, Congress was to declare them. So momentous a decision could not be reposed in the hands of a single man.

Point this out today—as I did in *The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*—and you find yourself on the wrong end of a lecture by indignant neoconservatives. The president has deployed troops abroad hundreds of times without the consent of Congress, they insist.

So what of these hundreds of cases of presidential warmaking? This claim originated—surprise!—with the U.S. government itself. At the time of the Korean War, a number of congressmen contended that “history will show that on more than

100 occasions in the life of this Republic the President as Commander in Chief has ordered the fleet or the troops to do certain things which involved the risk of war" without the consent of Congress. In 1966, in defense of the Vietnam War, the State Department adopted a similar line: "Since the Constitution was adopted there have been at least 125 instances in which the President has ordered the armed forces to take action or maintain positions abroad without obtaining prior congressional authorization, starting with the 'undeclared war' with France (1798–1800)."

"THE CONTEST FOR AGES," DANIEL WEBSTER ONCE SAID, "HAS BEEN TO RESCUE LIBERTY FROM THE GRASP OF EXECUTIVE POWER."

I have argued elsewhere that the quasi-war with France in no way lends support to those who favor broad presidential war powers. As for the rest, the great presidential scholar Edward S. Corwin helpfully observed that this lengthy list of alleged precedents consisted mainly of "fights with pirates, landings of small naval contingents on barbarous or semi-barbarous coasts, the dispatch of small bodies of troops to chase bandits or cattle rustlers across the Mexican border, and the like." In other words, the "hundreds of times" argument, like so much else about the imperial presidency, is a grotesque fraud.

As for the delicate souls whose consciences were so deeply troubled by George W. Bush's unilateral initiation of war in 2003, where were they in 1999 when Bill Clinton, acting through NATO and siding with the Muslims of Kosovo, orchestrated a bombing campaign against Serbia without the consent of Congress? David Gray Adler, an expert on foreign policy and the Constitution, went so far as to call Clinton's action against Serbia "one of the most flagrant

acts of usurpation of the war power in the history of the Republic." That's saying something, since presidents from both political parties had openly defied the Constitution's distribution of war powers between Congress and the president for nearly half a century by the time of the Kosovo intervention.

Clinton's disregard of the Constitution, Adler argued, was unique since it was "the first time in our history that a president waged war in the face of a direct congressional refusal to authorize the war." Adler is right: legislation that would have authorized the president to

conduct his air war against the Serbs failed to pass the House on April 28, 1999, but Clinton went forward with his military plans anyway. "Clinton's defiance of the House vote," Adler concluded, "raised arbitrary executive power to a new and dangerous pitch." Apart from a few pockets of principled resistance here and there, where were our present guardians of constitutional liberty?

"The contest for ages," Daniel Webster once said, "has been to rescue liberty from the grasp of executive power." The contest today, on the other hand, far from an effort to limit executive power and its inherent dangers, amounts instead to a struggle to gain executive power in order to wield it against ideological adversaries and on behalf of some political agenda.

This is what Robert Nisbet meant when he noted in the wake of Watergate that that scandal's long-term impact would not be to weaken the executive, since even Richard Nixon's liberal opponents still believed in a strong presidency—provided it was occupied by

one of their own. "There are too many powerful voices among intellectuals—in press, foundation, and elsewhere—that want a royal President provided only that he is the right kind of individual."

The lesson that all too many conservatives seem to have drawn from the Clinton years is not that executive power needs to be better defined and controlled but that it needs to be exercised by a Republican. Likewise, one might think two terms of a George W. Bush presidency would teach the Left a thing or two about executive power, but for all their carping at the president, most liberals seem quite happy with the status quo as long as the president issues executive orders on behalf of fashionable causes. Then when another neoconservative takes office and uses that power as George W. Bush has, the Left will trot out its now familiar routine of shock and indignation. Some opposition.

Both liberals and at least some conservatives must share the blame for contributing to an ideological climate of which the inevitable outcome is the unrestrained executive under which our Republic now groans. Ultimately, though, apportioning responsibility for this transformation of the presidency, in which its occupant can flagrantly and defiantly violate the law, is of much less urgency than addressing—and, one hopes, correcting—the present debacle.

Former congressman Bob Barr, a conservative from Georgia, has it right: "The American people are going to have to say, 'Enough of this business of justifying everything as necessary for the war on terror.' Either the Constitution and the laws of this country mean something or they don't. It is truly frightening what is going on in this country." ■

Thomas E. Woods Jr. is the author of the New York Times bestseller The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History.

Come Home, America

Liberals need another George McGovern—and perhaps conservatives do too.

By Bill Kauffman

TO THE SLANTING WALL above my desk is taped a large “Come Home America/ Vote McGovern Shriver ’72” poster. Designed by artist Leonard R. Fuller, the collage fills an outline of the United States with iconographic images, historic statuary, and photos of unprepossessing but individuated Americans. The message is peace and brotherhood and a return to the ideals of the Founders. The mood is civics-class hippie, antiwar wife-of-a-Rotarian, liberal community-college-professor-who-cries-at-“America the Beautiful.” Like George McGovern himself, the poster suggests that a hopeful and patriotic mild radicalism resides on Main Street America. Or as Elvis Costello and Nick Lowe once asked, what’s so funny ‘bout peace, love, and understanding?

Even now, 30 and three years after Sen. George McGovern of Mitchell, South Dakota was buried by Richard M. Nixon under an electoral-vote landslide of 520-17-1 (Virginia elector Roger MacBride, heir to the *Little House on the Prairie* goldmine, bolted Nixon for Libertarian John Hospers), “McGovernism” remains Beltway shorthand for a parodistic liberalism that is, at once, ineffectual, licentious, and wooly-headed. It stands for “acid, amnesty, and abortion,” as the Humphrey-Jackson Democrats put it.

But perhaps, as George McGovern ages gracefully while his country does not, it is time to stop looking at McGovern through the lenses of Scoop Jackson and those neoconservative publicists who so often trace their disenchantment with the Democratic Party to the 1972

campaign. What if we refocus the image and see the George McGovern who doesn’t fit the cartoon? Son of a Wesleyan Methodist minister who had played second base in the St. Louis Cardinals farm system, this other George McGovern revered Charles Lindbergh as “our greatest American” and counted among his happiest memories those “joyous experiences with my dad” hunting pheasants. He was voted “The Most Representative Senior Boy” in his high school and went to the college down the street, walking a mile each morning to Dakota Wesleyan and then coming home for lunch.

This other George McGovern was a bomber pilot who flew 35 B-24 missions in the Dakota Queen, named after his wife, Eleanor Stegeberg of Woonsocket, South Dakota, whom he had courted at the Mitchell Roller Rink. He grew up in and remains a congregant of the First United Methodist Church of Mitchell; he knows by heart the “old hymns” and sings them aloud “with the gusto of those devout congregations that shaped my life so many years ago.” This other George McGovern is a lifelong St. Louis Cardinals fan and member in good standing of the Stan Musial Society. He lives most of the year in Mitchell, his hometown, and says, “There is a wholesomeness about life in a rural state that is a meaningful factor. It doesn’t guarantee you are going to be a good guy simply because you grow up in an agricultural area, but I think the chances of it are better, because of the sense of well-being, the confidence in the

decency of life that comes with working not only with the land but also with the kinds of people who live on the land. Life tends to be more authentic and less artificial than in urban areas. You have a sense of belonging to a community. You’re closer to nature and you see the changing seasons.”

This George McGovern, dyed deeply in the American grain, is a hell of a lot more interesting than the burlesque that was framed by his neocon critics.

* * *

On a clement November morn, I chatted with Senator McGovern in his room at the Jefferson Hotel in Washington. He was in town for a memorial service for his friend, the late Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.), another casualty of 1980, when a pack of liberal Senate Democratic lions were defeated by New Right “family values” Republicans, many of them with rather more unconventional domestic lives than the liberals.

Targeted by Terry Dolan and NCPAC, McGovern was trounced 58-39 percent by the ineloquent James Abdnor. McGovern can laugh now about the perversity of the 1980 election. “It ticked me off, and it was also kind of laughable. A group called American Family Index rated us. I came out with a zero, Jim Abdnor got a perfect score. Here I am a guy who has been married to the same woman for 37 [now 62] years with five children and ten grandchildren and I’m running against Jim Abdnor, a 58-year-old bachelor who gets a 100 percent rating. I’m not against 58-year-old bach-

elors, not for one minute, but they're hardly a symbol of what promotes the American family."

McGovern is, as you might guess, an opponent of the Iraq War and the Bush administration, which he finds appallingly un-conservative. "I like conservatives," he says, citing Bob Dole and Barry Goldwater. "Bob Taft I always admired." He grins. "But I don't like these neoconservatives worth a damn! They have this view that we are so much more powerful than any other country in the world that we need to run the world—none of this business of coexistence. I think that's just terrible. It's not conservatism, and it's not liberalism, either. It's a new doctrine that I find frightening. If Iraq hadn't gone sour, there was a whole string of countries they were gonna knock off. That's not conservatism to me."

I ask if Iraq is yet in Vietnam's class as a foreign-policy disaster. "The casualty rate isn't nearly as high," he responds, "but the assumptions are just as misguided. Vietnam was a logical expression of the Cold War ideology that we operated under for half a century. If you accepted the view that we had to confront communism wherever it raised its head, Vietnam became perfectly logical." (McGovern quotes approvingly his pheasant-hunting friend, University of South Dakota history professor Herbert Schell, who told a reporter in 1972, "He is the only nominee of either major party since World War II who has not accepted the assumptions of the Cold War." Bob Taft would have been on the list, too, had he been the GOP nominee in 1948 or '52.)

What advice does McGovern, one of the first Democrats to dissent from a Democratic war in the 1960s, have for antiwar Republicans? "Make a little more noise," he says. He points to the House Republicans who voted against the Iraq War. "They're the kind of Repub-

licans I've always admired. They're close to where my father would have been. He was a lifelong Republican. My dad was a big admirer of old Bob La Follette and voted for him when he ran for president. It's an honorable tradition to be a dissenting Republican." (One of McGovern's early enthusiasms as a senator was a war-profits tax, which came straight out of the La Follette tradition.)

With the Oregon Republican and neo-Taftie Mark Hatfield, McGovern sponsored the 1970 McGovern-Hatfield "Amendment to End the War," which called for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and "an end to all U.S. military operations in or over Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos no later than December 31, 1971."

Impatient with the chronically cautious, with the kind of eunuchs who tell you behind closed doors that they're against a war but don't want to risk their position by taking a public stand, McGovern told his colleagues, "Every Senator in this Chamber is partly responsible for sending 50,000 young Americans to an early grave. This Chamber reeks of blood."

It still does, senator. It still does.

* * *

Robert Sam Anson wrote in *McGovern*, his fine biography, "To the extent that his vision of life is bounded by certain, immutable values—the importance of family, the dependence on nature, the strength of community, the worth of living things—he is a conservative. He seeks not so much to change America as to restore it, to return it to the earliest days of the Republic, which he believes, naively or not, were fundamentally decent, humane, and just. Like the Populists, he is willing to gamble with radical means to accomplish his end. There remains in him, though, as it remained in the Populists, a lingering distrust of government, a suspicion of bigness in all its forms."

I read that to McGovern. Was there a "conservative" side to him that somehow people missed?

"Absolutely," he replies. "I remember that observation. I'm a confirmed liberal, but I think there's a conservative aspect to liberalism at its best": an awareness of limits, a respect for tradition, a love of the familiar. For instance, McGovern writes in his autobiography, "I prefer old houses or churches or public buildings that are built for the ages rather than modern-style structures that quickly deteriorate. I am uncomfortable with any translation of the Bible other than the magnificent King James version." He traces this "sense of stability and permanence" to his thrifty family of Dakota Methodists.

"Throughout his congressional career, George McGovern won elections by conceptualizing his constituents as peaceful Christian agriculturalists," wrote South Dakota State University political scientist Gary Aguiar. He spoke South Dakotan as fluently as he spoke liberalese, and when he asked, in 1972, "Who really appointed us to play God for people elsewhere around the globe?" he was grounded in plains soil as surely as Scoop Jackson was riding first class aboard Boeing.

For sharing his father's skepticism about military crusades, McGovern, holder of the Distinguished Flying Cross, was mocked for being "weak on defense." Stephen Ambrose, who wrote up McGovern's military career in *The Wild Blue*, thought that he ought to have used his bomber pilot experience "to more effect in his 1972 presidential campaign."

"I think it was a political error," McGovern tells me, "but I always felt kind of foolish talking about my war record—what a hero I was. How do you do that?"

Well, you don't if you're a polite, decent fellow from Mitchell, South

Dakota—even when you're being pilloried as a Nervous Nellie by think-tank commanders who wouldn't know an M-1 Garand from a grenade. LBJ had urged McGovern to sell himself as an avenging angel of the air, but McGovern demurred, saying that "it was not in my nature to turn the campaign into a constant exercise in self-congratulatory autobiography."

McGovern lost not only because the bomber pilot was transmogrified into a cringing apostle of appeasement. His disastrous selection of the dishonest mental patient Thomas Eagleton as his first running mate derailed the campaign coming out of the convention. (Hunter S. Thompson is brilliantly savage on the phony martyr Eagleton in his *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*, the best book on the election.) The shooting and crippling of George Wallace prevented a probable third-party bid by Wallace that might have attracted 15-20 percent of the general election vote and tipped a number of states McGovernward.

I suppose no Democrat could have defeated Nixon in 1972. The incumbent's popularity was buoyed by a fairly strong economy, détente with the USSR, the opening to China, and rumors of peace in Vietnam. But still, imagine George McGovern running not as an ultraliberal caricature but rather as the small-town Midwestern Methodist, a war hero too modest to boast of his bravery, a liberal with a sympathetic understanding of conservative rural America. That George McGovern might have given Nixon a run for Maurice Stans's money.

In his autobiography *Grassroots*, McGovern wrote that "to this day I remain addicted to movies and those who act in them." He was a bit starstruck, and the stars reciprocated: his 1972 campaign featured prominently Warren Beatty, Shirley MacLaine,

Dennis Weaver, and other stellar eminences of varying magnitudes. Alas, their presence lent the McGovern campaign a taint of Hollywoodish decadence that partly erased the South Dakota Methodist McGovern who would have played so much better in Middle America. "I've wondered about that myself," McGovern says. "I still treasure their endorsement, but it may have offset the South Dakota image."

As for acid, amnesty, and abortion, McGovern's positions now seem positively temperate: he favored decriminalizing marijuana; he argued against "the intrusion of the federal government" into abortion law, which should be left to the states; and, as he told me, "I could not favor amnesty as long as the war was in progress, but once it was over, I'd grant amnesty both to those who planned the war and those who refused to participate. I think that's a somewhat conservative position."

In the home stretch of the '72 campaign, McGovern was groping toward truths that exist far beyond the cattle pens of Left and Right. "Government has become so vast and impersonal that its interests diverge more and more from the interests of ordinary citizens," he said two days before the election. "For a generation and more, the government has sought to meet our needs by multiplying its bureaucracy. Washington has taken too much in taxes from Main Street, and Main Street has received too little in return. It is not necessary to centralize power in order to solve our problems." Charging that Nixon "uncritically clings to bloated bureaucracies, both civilian and military," McGovern promised to "decentralize our system."

In the clutter and chaos of the campaign, one discerns themes that place McGovern on a whole other plane from that drab anteroom of Democratic losers, the Mondales and Dukakis and Humphreys and Kerrys. George McGov-

ern had convictions; like Barry Goldwater in 1964, he stood for a set of ideals rooted in the American past. He spoke of open government, peace, the defense of the individual and the community against corporate power, a Congress that reasserts the power to declare war. After Eagleton's petulant departure, McGovern chose as his veep the undervalued Sargent Shriver, founding member of the America First Committee, a pro-life Catholic who admired Dorothy Day.

Unlike the bilious Ed Muskie, who dismissed George Wallace's Florida primary victory as a triumph of racism, McGovern credited Wallace's appeal to "a sense of powerlessness in the face of big government, big corporations, and big labor unions." He asked Wallace for his endorsement, though as he recalls with a smile, "He said, 'Sena-tah, if I endorsed you I'd lose about half of my following and you'd lose half of yours.'" Well, maybe, guv-nah—but just think of the coalescent possibilities of the remaining halves.

"It is not prejudice to fear for your family's safety or to resent tax inequities. ... It is time to recognize this and to stop labeling people 'racist' or 'militant,' to stop putting people in different camps, to stop inciting one American against another," said McGovern, who called the Wallace vote "an angry cry from the guts of ordinary Americans against a system which doesn't seem to give a damn about what is really bothering people in this country today." Yet McGovern defended busing, in which children were uprooted, sent away from neighborhoods, and a pitiless war was waged upon working-class urban Catholics.

Look: George McGovern was a liberal Democrat. He voted for social-welfare programs of every shape and size; his philosophy then and now was a product, he says, of the Social Gospel movement, which translates Christianity into an interventionist welfare state.

But at its not-frequent-enough best, McGovernism combined New Left participatory democracy with the small-town populism of the Upper Midwest. In a couple of April 1972 speeches, he seemed to second Barry Goldwater's 1968 remark to aide Karl Hess that "When the histories are written, I'll bet that the Old Right and the New Left are put down as having a lot in common and that the people in the middle will be the enemy."

"[M]ost Americans see the establishment center as an empty, decaying void that commands neither their confidence nor their love," McGovern asserted in one of the great unknown campaign speeches in American history. "It is the establishment center that has led us into the stupidest and cruelest war in all history. That war is a moral and political disaster—a terrible cancer eating away the soul of the nation. ... It was not the American worker who designed the Vietnam war or our military machine. It was the establishment wise men, the academicians of the center. As Walter Lippmann once observed, 'There is nothing worse than a belligerent professor.'"

Try to imagine a Democratic backbencher, let alone a presidential candidate, saying as much today. No wonder the scriveners of the Suffocating Center have no more potent imprecation in their thesauri than "McGovernism."

Candidate McGovern called for a U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam and South Korea and a partial pullout of troops from Europe. In his acceptance speech, which with exquisitely bad planning was delivered at 3:00 a.m. eastern time, or primetime in Guam, McGovern declared, "This is also the time to turn away from excessive preoccupation overseas to rebuilding our own nation." Close your eyes and you can hear McGovern's prairie drawl backing Merle Haggard's latest release: "Let's get out of Iraq and get back on the track/And let's rebuild America first."

"Come home, America," McGovern pled in that 1972 campaign. "Come home from the wilderness of needless war and excessive militarism."

"Come home, America," the most moving, the most resonant, the truest political slogan in the history of our Republic, was suggested by Eleanor McGovern after she saw the phrase in a speech by Martin Luther King. Because it echoed the peaceful dreams of the old Middle American isolationists and because it drew a sharp contrast between the vision of the Founders and the condition of modern America, McGovern was roasted for the slogan by the Vital Centurions.

"Late in the campaign I was having a visit with Clark Clifford," remembers McGovern, "and I said, 'Clark, just out of curiosity, what do you think of my slogan, Come Home America?' He said, 'Well, George, to be honest with you, I don't know what it means.'"

Of course he didn't! No bumper sticker that Clark Clifford understood would have been worth the vinyl it was printed on.

* * *

"Food, farmers and his fellow man—those are the foundation stones upon which George McGovern has built his philosophy of life," ran a flattering press account early in the senator's career, and in his retirement he returned to that trinity.

Appointed U.S. ambassador to the UN Agencies for Food and Agriculture by President Clinton, McGovern lobbied for a universal school-lunch program funded partly by a \$1.2 billion annual U.S. contribution. As an isolationist skeptical of foreign aid, I am able to restrain my huzzahs, but I'd sure as hell rather spend a billion buying lunch for kids in Bangladesh than \$300 billion occupying Iraq.

In his latest book, *The Essential America*, McGovern keeps the faith of '72. "Let's support our troops by keeping them safely at home with their families rather than dispatching them abroad under the cockeyed notion of what our president has called 'preemptive war,'" he advises. The petty tyrannies and indignities of the war on terror infuriate him: "I have no fear of doing battle with some character threatening me with a box cutter. What sets my teeth on edge is seeing a frail little aging woman trying to get her shoes off to be searched, lest she slip by with some trinket that could endanger the republic."

He quotes Dwight Eisenhower at greater length than any another political figure in *The Essential America*. Eisenhower's Farewell Address warning of the dangers of the military-industrial complex is virtual samizdat in the age of Homeland Security; while McGovern remains fond of Adlai Stevenson, he admits that in the postwar era, Ike "was the best president at recognizing the dangers of excessive military outlays. And he showed great courage in stopping the Israeli move against Egypt over the Suez Canal."

He calls the Patriot Act "completely unnecessary ... a contradiction of the Bill of Rights" and counsels resistance if and when the federal police come for our library cards: "I'll go to jail rather than accept such an invasion of my freedom as an American."

At 83, George McGovern remains a voice for peace and freedom in a party that looks ready to nominate the militaristic schoolmarm Hillary Clinton as its next standard-bearer. Oh, how the Democrats could use a bracing shot of McGovernism. ■

Bill Kauffman's most recent book is Dispatches from the Muckdog Gazette. His Look Homeward, America is due in May from ISI Books.

God and Man at the Box Office

The Christian fable of Narnia charms believers and skeptics alike.

By John Zmirak

DON'T BUY INTO the hype: the life of a right-wing journalist is not all glitz and glamour. Not all of us pass our evenings sipping Glenfiddich with Ann Coulter at the Pierre, trying to get a word in edgewise. In fact, I spent one recent Friday night in a Times Square theater full of adult Manhattanites at a movie with talking beavers. And a perky 8-year-old English girl with crooked teeth. And a goat-boy named Tumnus. No hunks, no babes, and nary a kiss. The only "hot" woman in the movie was a six-foot-plus witch with blonde dreadlocks and a kinky habit of torturing centaurs. The film's stars were teens and children, but there wasn't one kid in the audience. Nor were these moviegoers bused in from some evangelical church—there were too many women wearing black, holding hands with Nader voters. But nobody snorted at the moments of outright Christian allegory or scoffed at the galloping satyrs. Only one person even got up to go to the bathroom. These urbanites sat, spellbound, for more than two hours, some with tears on their cheeks, and at the end they burst into applause. At last I had to face the fact: New Yorkers are into Narnia.

"The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe" made \$67 million in its opening weekend, covering almost half its costs, and received glowing reviews from most major papers, including the *New York Times*. (Only the lowbrow *New York Post* and drab suburban *Newsday* disagreed.) Ladies and gentlemen, what we have here is a hit—and the prospect of six more Narnia movies to compete with the Harry Potter fran-

chise. Look for C.S. Lewis sections to spring up in the bookstores, crowding up against the Tolkien shelves, in a veritable onslaught of Oxford Christian whimsy. This is good news all around—and not just because it's going to get people reading Lewis's apologetic books, such as *Mere Christianity*, or his brilliant love story *Till We Have Faces*.

While it may exercise some red-state rabble rousers like Bill O'Reilly, none of us should get caught up in the question that roils many critics: how Christian is Narnia? It's absurd to see serious writers dissecting this fantasy for catechetical intent—as if it were a remake of "Triumph of the Will" or a piece of crypto-Scientology. (It's also, if you think about it, rather offensive; imagine the uproar if someone asked out loud whether a Woody Allen film or Philip Roth book were sectarian propaganda.)

Besides, the answer is obvious: the Narnia books are Christian stories written by a popular theologian for a tepidly Anglican audience, which now find tremendous resonance with a broadly Christian America. And this is nothing new. As any scholar of film could tell you, American movies are rife with Christian tropes and themes—such as the archetype of a lone hero confronting evil, suffering horribly, plummeting into a void of doubt and near despair, then rising triumphantly to redeem the community that had once rejected him. One could rattle off endless examples of films that students of cinema have singled out as particularly Christ-haunted: "It's a Wonderful Life," "Meet John Doe," "Shane," "On the Waterfront," "Cool

Hand Luke," "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." The reason "The Passion of the Christ" made such a splash—beyond the silly noises made by modern-day scribes and Sadducees slandering it as anti-Semitic—was that Mel Gibson reached behind these disguised retellings of the Christ story to shock us with the original, in colors as bold and almost crude as the restored Sistine Chapel, stripped clean of the varnish, dust, and smoke. So does Narnia, which subjects its gentle lion king to sadistic slaughter by monsters from Bosch. The sight of Aslan shaved, bound, and stretched out for judicial murder at the hands of the icy anti-mother goddess Jadis should be enough to make almost anyone cry. Nor does the film rush his resurrection. While the viewer is confident that good will triumph in the end—this is not a French or German film—he really does wade through the same despair as the good Lucy and Susan, who caress the fallen Aslan like Christ deposed from the Cross. The grace won here does not feel false or come cheap.

That answers the real question that any of us ought to ask about the film—whether it is more than a piece of mere apologetics for *Mere Christianity*. Does the film build on the stones of its biblical subtext an edifice of complex characters, engaging plot, and a convincing cinematic world? Is it an airport chapel or Chartres? To put it another way, does the film cast a spell and make you forget for two hours your adult identity as a sophisticated sinner and identify with a band of British refugee children adrift in a wintry kingdom?

The answer is mostly yes. There are moments in the film where one of the children is a little too twee and you almost want to smack him. Here and there Lewis's bachelor whimsy begins to feel a little strained—but not nearly as often as in each of the last four “Star Wars” films. (At least here you never feel that one of the characters or events was crafted solely to generate plush dolls or a knock-off video game—though I winced to see Narnia lip-balm at Eckerd.)

In his books, J.R.R. Tolkien took the risk of introducing only one species, hobbits, that we might plausibly call cute; the rest are positively grim. His elves are existentialists. Lewis, for his part, showed significantly more daring. To Tolkien's horror, Lewis made of his Narnia books a glittering pastiche of multicultural myths. While Tolkien was soberly “Northern” and intent upon crafting a self-consistent world with a history as convincingly grim as our own, Lewis allowed himself to playfully redeem elements of many different paganisms, from Spitzbergen to Mt. Olympus. He summons mermaids, fauns, dryads, giants, centaurs, gryphons, and phoenixes in a shameless display of ecumenism. And on the whole it works—far better than it ought to. Lewis's world has all the loveable, sloppy, promiscuous charm of the Harry Potter books, with none of their moral mish-mash. Lewis even dares to redeem one element of our Christian history—which the film does nothing to white-wash—the Crusades. As a boy who grew up reading with awe old tales—they won't be reprinted—of Richard and Godfrey and Roland, I thrilled to see the young King Peter dressed as a Christian knight, with the shield of the Lionheart, holding back the jihad warriors of a bloodthirsty false religion.

In other words, this film recalls us both to Christ and Christendom, to the Gospel and the historical Church. To the outrage

of pedantic misreaders like *The New Yorker's* Adam Gopnik, the Narnia books dare to show Christ not merely as a Suffering Servant, but as a king. We see the Second Person of the Trinity go from glory to torture and then to greater glory—and then to conquest. The books go from Genesis not simply to Calvary, but through Easter morning to the brink of the New Jerusalem—and they carry with them millions of readers, performing what theologians used to call *preparatio evangelium*. They do so with grace and charm, returning the reader in his mind to the childlike wonder that Jesus Himself found irresistibly attractive. This is no small feat. Those who dismiss Lewis's work as a “mere allegory” should think on this—and remember that other “mere allegories” include the Romance of the Rose, Piers Ploughman, and St. John's Apocalypse.

There was only one important element in “Narnia” that left me a little unsatisfied, and it was lifted intact from the original: the story of Edmund. As readers will remember, Aslan must offer his life to the killer queen to redeem young Edmund, the “son of Adam” who briefly but crucially played the traitor, selling his siblings' safety for the promise of power and a taste of Turkish Delight. When Aslan submits to suffering and death, it is not for all the inhabitants of Narnia, or even for all four humans, but only for Edmund—almost, speaking allegorically, as if Jesus had died for Judas alone. Now theologically this is sound; the fall of Adam was enough to require a Redeemer, and we are taught to consider piously that Jesus died not in general for all but in particular for each of us.

Dramatically and psychologically, this explanation leaves us unsatisfied. The scene in which Edmund “confesses” his sins to Aslan, and walks off “absolved” rings powerfully to any penitent—and reminds us that Lewis was an Anglican

who frequented private confession. But things start to go awry from the moment Queen Jadis demands the blood of Edmund in fulfillment of the Deep Magic that underlies the existence of Narnia. It's impossible to look at poor Edmund—who was never very wicked in the first place—and not feel that he, instead of Aslan, is a kind of scapegoat. All around him are creatures completely innocent, who inhabit an essentially unfallen world. Aslan is not dying for any of them—but only for Edmund. He skulks away with a shame that reminds us of Judas in “The Passion.” It's true that Edmund fights heroically and is crowned at the end along with his three siblings. But we still feel bad for Edmund and a twinge of cognitive dissonance at this departure from the narrative of salvation. We know that Peter, and Susan, and Lucy—and even Mr. Tumnus and Mrs. Beaver—ought somehow to feel implicated in Edmund and his sin, that in a fallen world every conscious, free creature requires redemption. To heap all the sin on Edmund feels dramatically and theologically wrong. In the Gospel, it was Jesus who bore the burden of all our sin, who “became as sin,” and in doing so purged us all. That element is missing in Lewis's world, and the lack is troubling.

But this dramatic flaw—Lewis might have called it poetic license—is not enough to taint the magnitude of his achievement, the delight we take in seeing eternal truths depicted so playfully and well, or the powerful contribution to our culture which this film and its (hoped-for) sequels are sure to make. This first film is moving, rousing, and thought-provoking. Even its talking beavers are plausible—especially after a pint or two. ■

John Zmirak is author of The Bad Catholic's Guide to Good Living and a contributing editor to Godspy, where a version of this piece also appeared.

Peace Candidate, '68 Vintage

TAC's publishing schedule did not allow for a timely obituary of Eugene McCarthy, but the late senator deserves notice in these pages: his views—and particu-

larly his long frustration with the limitations of two-party hegemony—have a great deal of common ground with this magazine.

There are inevitably some personal ties as well. In the winter of 1968, I was a student at a New Hampshire boarding school and with dozens of my classmates went out to canvass for McCarthy on the weekends. His strong New Hampshire primary performance against incumbent Lyndon Johnson—running almost entirely on an anti-Vietnam War plank—was enough to persuade Johnson to withdraw from the race and to entice Bobby Kennedy to throw his own hat into the ring. I recall little about the campaign besides the buttons and a large billboard in Manhattan showing McCarthy's face and windblown hair, proclaiming something like "a breath of fresh air." But I knew—or thought I did—enough about the Vietnam War to support any candidate who would stand against it. If you opposed the war in 1967 and early 1968, it was tremendously frustrating that there was almost no established politician who would stand up against it, seemingly no chance that it could be ended or even combated through electoral means, and that much of the vocal opposition to the war was monopolized by the hard Left. That would change over the next few years, but it was certainly McCarthy's campaign that broke the establishment logjam.

Much has been written about McCarthy's quixotic, almost diffident campaign, his seeming reluctance to be

a leader in the normal political sense. The world of campaigns is rife with anecdotes about his "laziness"—his late rising, his refusal to say the same thing again and again, his general lack of doggedness and stamina as a candidate. I assume these charges were true, and yet it cannot be denied that he and only he among established political figures was willing to take the first plunge and take up the antiwar banner against Johnson in late 1967.

In his later years, his views—if not his political style—were rather Buchananite. He was long a believer that the United States should control its borders, writing in the 1990s an immigration-control polemic entitled *A Colony of the World: the United States Today*, taking issue with the bipartisan establishment idea that the U.S. should serve as a kind of drainage vessel for the surplus populations of other nations, and serving as an advisory-board member of the immigration-control group FAIR. He was a trade protectionist as well and naturally was skeptical about the Iraq War.

In the winter of 2000, when Pat Buchanan was running for president on the Reform Party ticket, Kara Hopkins and I had dinner with Gene McCarthy at Washington's Jockey Club. He had spoken favorably of Buchanan's presidential bid to a reporter from the *L.A. Times*, and it was our intent to feel out whether Gene would publicly endorse Pat or perhaps even sign on to an important advisory role in the campaign.

During the course of a delightful dinner, he commented—generally favorably—on the language and rhythm of Pat's speeches and urged the campaign to do something to address "the issue of time." He meant the way people are overscheduled in the modern world and don't have time to savor life's experiences. He was right, though it was hard for us to think of a four-point plan that might speak to the issue. He deferred a decision on the endorsement question, letting us know that Jesse Ventura, his home state's governor and a player in the complicated and invariably vicious internecine wars of the Reform Party, had been extremely gracious to him recently. What was unsaid was that Ventura and the Reformers who were then backing Buchanan were on opposing sides. It was too bad—I think Gene could have connected in a public way the various strands of Buchananism, which is far more than a right-wing phenomenon, much better than the campaign was able to do on its own.

McCarthy was old then, but his mind was sharp. After the dinner, Kara drove him home to his Washington apartment and helped him up the outer steps, terrified that he would fall and that she would forever go down in history as the person on the scene at Gene McCarthy's death.

1968 is supposed to be a sort of devil year in the conservative calendar, akin almost to 1789 and 1917. But there was something special and deeply democratic about a poetic, intelligent senator stepping forward to mobilize and give political focus to all that unrepresented sentiment. Pat Buchanan has written recently that a Gene McCarthy for our day will emerge soon. We should be so fortunate. ■

Of Borders and Ballots

2006 may be immigration reform's year.

By W. James Antle III

WILL IMMIGRATION be a major factor in this year's campaigns? Many poll watchers think so, calling it the gay marriage of 2006—the definitive social issue on many voters' minds despite the political class's manifest disinterest. Political analyst Jennifer Duffy, an editor of the *Cook Political Report*, told the *Los Angeles Times*, "Whether immigration dominates a race or shapes it, I expect every competitive race to engage on it on some level."

The midterm elections offer immigration reformers an unprecedented opportunity, but their success is hardly guaranteed. Already opponents of serious reform are working overtime to co-opt the issue by cloaking guest-workers programs in border-security rhetoric. Immigration restrictionists will need to go beyond running protest candidates and start winning more elections. Sending Washington a message matters less at this point than sending sympathetic legislators.

The December special election to fill the House seat vacated by California Republican Chris Cox illustrates both the potential and the problem. Former state Sen. John Campbell, a conventional Orange County Republican, would have cruised to an easy victory in the GOP-dominated district if immigration politics hadn't intruded.

Instead Jim Gilchrist, a founder of the Minuteman Project, entered the race on a third-party ticket. He raised \$600,000 and ended up getting 25 percent of the vote. Campbell won only after his campaign spent liberally to get likely supporters to fill out absentee ballots; Gilchrist actually

beat him among voters who turned out on election day. Ten days later, the House of Representatives voted 239 to 182 in favor of a tough immigration-enforcement bill with no amnesty provisions. At least some of those votes were motivated by fear of Gilchrist imitators. Perhaps Campbell himself was scared straight—he eventually modified his position on guest workers and repudiated past votes giving illegal aliens in-state tuition and recognizing Mexican consulate cards.

But there is more than one way to spin an election outcome. Just as the conventional wisdom transformed the success of California's anti-illegal-alien Proposition 187 into a morality tale about angry white Republicans, Gilchrist's loss will be portrayed as proof that immigration reform isn't really a winning issue. The Orange County GOP chairman scoffed to reporters, "It looks like it didn't work out for Jimmy-One-Note."

"I wasn't a one-issue candidate," Gilchrist retorts, rattling off his platform planks on Iraq and tax reform. "My opponents were no-issue candidates." He plans to run again in 2006; the only question that remains is who his next target will be. Under California law, Gilchrist is ineligible to re-register to run as a major-party candidate in this election cycle ("I'm a Reagan Republican disillusioned with my party," he says). That means he could seek a rematch against Campbell or run in another GOP-held district. Some supporters, however, would prefer to see him campaign statewide, challenging either Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) or Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Only when discussing Schwarzenegger does Gilchrist sound reluctant. "Personally, I like the governor," he says. "He's been very supportive of the Minuteman Project." But if Schwarzenegger were to break his pledge to veto drivers' licenses for illegal aliens, "I could see myself getting into that race." Gilchrist plans to make a decision at the end of January.

He won't be the only immigration-reform stalwart on the ballot this year. Canyon County Commissioner Robert Vasquez is running for Congress in Idaho. Vasquez has gained national notoriety for his creative efforts to combat illegal immigration. He sent the Mexican consulate a bill for over \$2 million to pay the costs the county incurred providing social services to illegals. He sought to use federal racketeering statutes against major employers of unlawful migrants. (A judge dismissed the lawsuit on Dec. 14.) And the Republican is critical of the Bush administration on this issue. "There can be no border security with any kind of a guest worker program," Vasquez told the Associated Press. "All that's going to do is increase the numbers coming across to get here in time for amnesty."

Vasquez's primary opponent disagrees. Sheila Sorensen favors a guest-workers program and calls the RICO lawsuits against the illegals' employers "ridiculous." Her campaign website touts businesses as "part of the immigration solution" and warns, "It's impossible to seal the borders." But Sorensen is careful to make her immigration-policy differences with Vasquez sound like a

matter of prudence rather than a dispute over the need to secure the borders. Despite her guest-workers stance, she claims to oppose amnesty and support tough enforcement measures.

Another immigration reformer to watch is Arizona Republican Randy Graf, who is running to succeed retiring Congressman Jim Kolbe (R-Ariz.). Graf was a senior adviser to the committee that introduced Proposition 200, a successful ballot initiative aimed at curbing social services for illegal aliens. Every Republican in the state's congressional delegation opposed the measure, but it won 56 percent of the vote. In 2004, Graf left his position as majority whip in the Arizona House of Representatives to mount a primary challenge to Kolbe, winning 43 percent of the vote and carrying Cochise County despite being outspent more than 6 to 1. A major point of contention was Kolbe's sponsorship of guest-workers legislation.

"I consider guest-worker status for illegal aliens amnesty," says Graf. While announcing his retirement, Kolbe took a swing at his former primary challenger: "I'll be honest, I think we can do better than Randy Graf. ... A lot of his campaign is based on anti-Kolbe and anti-immigration." Several of the congressman's moderate allies are considering bids for the GOP nomination and some Democrats see the district, which only narrowly voted for President Bush in the last election, as a pickup opportunity.

Graf believes opponents are underestimating his general-election viability, pointing out that his immigration realism is augmented by conservative stands on other issues. "No one has been able to explain to me why I'm too conservative for this district," he says.

Candidates who are outspoken opponents of the immigration status quo have slowly been gaining political momentum. The Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus, chaired by Congressman Tom

Tancredo (R-Colo.), contains more than a third of the House Republican Conference. In recent immigration votes, the caucus's positions have been supported by the full House, including dozens of Democrats. They were able to defeat attempts to attach guest-workers programs to legislation that would enhance border and interior enforcement.

Some commentators claim that Tancredo is leading his followers over a cliff. Their evidence includes the fact that Gilchrist isn't headed to Congress and Jerry Kilgore's recent loss in Virginia. As Andrew Ferguson put it in his column for Bloomberg News, "Republican gubernatorial candidate Jerry Kilgore lost his bid against a liberal Democrat in the heavily Republican Commonwealth of Virginia after anchoring his campaign in a get-tough attitude toward illegal immigrants."

"Republicans embrace anti-immigrant fervor at their peril," wrote Leslie Sanchez, an expert on Hispanic market trends, in the *Washington Post*. "The party is perilously close to adopting as its immigration policy the hanging of a 'closed' sign on the border." The *Wall Street Journal* predictably editorialized, "But immigration is an issue, like trade, that always looks better in the polls than it does on election day; very few people vote because of it."

Except that even proponents of mass immigration want to be seen as immigration enforcers. Every major guest-workers proposal on Capitol Hill promises toughness at the border, and supporters abjure the amnesty label. Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean accuses Republicans of "scapegoating immigrants" but concedes "we all agree we need to strengthen our borders and enforce our immigration laws."

Politicians who are squeamish about border control can read the polls as well as anyone else. According to Gallup, 56 percent of Americans wanted the federal government to focus on enforce-

ment rather than amnesty, and 52 percent said even legal immigration was a net economic detriment to the country. If anything, these survey results probably understate the issue's salience. Republican strategist Frank Luntz told *Time*, "This is the kind of issue that the Silent Majority talks about in private but doesn't mention to pollsters."

Yet it is true that restrictionist candidates don't always do as well as public opinion suggests they should. Given the impact each electoral defeat has on their cause, immigration reformers would do well to ponder this disconnect.

"Some of my own friends in the immigration-reform movement didn't vote for me," recalls Joe Guzzardi, a VDARE columnist who ran for governor in California's 2003 recall election. Part of the problem is that many voters who support immigration control actually vote on the basis of other concerns. Tying immigration to related issues—wages, education, health care, and taxes—could reduce those numbers.

Another obstacle is that single-issue immigration candidates are often inexperienced campaigners. "An immigration reformer should show they are a person capable of being a senator or congressman in other respects," Guzzardi says.

Seasoned politicians, on the other hand, can get by with tough-sounding gestures while boasting lackluster voting records. Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Neb.), for example, received a fair amount of press coverage for his co-sponsorship of a border-control bill, but his Americans for Better Immigration career rating is a "D" while his recent votes scored a "D-". Reformers need to insist that immigration not simply be a wedge issue, but also an action item.

Can reformers make progress despite these factors? Gilchrist, for his part, is optimistic. "I was a guy with no political experience when I first ran," he says. "And I'm just the beginning." ■

The Irrepressible Mencken

The bad boy of Baltimore has lost none of his punch—or relevance.

By Daniel McCarthy

FOR A MAN dead 50 years this month, H.L. Mencken remains remarkably prolific. No fewer than three volumes of wholly original Mencken material have seen print since 1989—first *The Diary of H.L. Mencken*, published against his explicit instructions, and more recently the memoirs *Thirty-Five Years of Newspaper Work* and *My Life as Author and Editor*. With this trove of fresh Menckiana have come, inevitably, new biographies, beginning in 1994 with Fred Hobson's *Mencken: A Life*. Terry Teachout followed eight years later with *The Skeptic*. And last November brought a third, touted as the most comprehensive yet, Marion Elizabeth Rodgers's *Mencken: The American Iconoclast*. Between these books and their contrails, Mencken has not been this much a public figure since the stroke that ended his career in 1948.

And what a career it was. Starting in 1899 at the tender age of 19, Mencken was a newspaperman for nearly five decades, working—usually for one or another of the *Baltimore Sunpapers*—as reporter, drama critic, city editor, columnist, Sunday editor, and editor in chief. At the same time, he led a parallel life in magazines, first as book editor of *The Smart Set* and soon, with George Jean Nathan, as its co-editor from 1914 to 1923. For a decade thereafter he helmed *The American Mercury*, a political and cultural monthly he founded with Nathan and publisher Alfred Knopf. Along the way, he and Nathan had launched three lucrative pulp magazines simply as cash cows.

All that, and Mencken still found time to write a half-dozen original books, including the first American works on Shaw and Nietzsche, and to revise and edit collections of his own journalism and essays amounting to about a score more. His tremendous output, as much as his vituperative talent and fortitude in assailing any eminence he thought a fraud or poltroon, led Walter Lippmann to acknowledge him in 1926 as “the most powerful personal influence on this whole generation of educated people.” The *New York Times* went one better, calling him “the most powerful man in America.”

But his reputation flagged in the 1930s, as the old broadsides against Rotarians and Baptists failed to amuse in the depths of the Depression. The *Mercury's* circulation slumped, owing to Mencken's diminished appeal and the magazine's suddenly steep cover price of 50 cents. Sniping critics took to calling its editor “the late Mr. Mencken,” while former friends like Nathan and Theodore Dreiser, launching their own magazine, took cheap shots at him.

Worse was to come. With the approach of World War II, Mencken recalled the Hun-bashing of the last great war. He felt no love for the English and no hatred of the Germans—quite the opposite—and above all he valued his freedom to speak his mind. Rather than submit to censorship, he resigned from the *Sunpapers*, retiring from journalism to write his memoirs, including the two that would be published posthumously and three volumes of youthful reminiscences—

Happy Days, *Newspaper Days*, and *Heathen Days*—that would prove his most popular works yet.

Their success came at price. In the '20s, Mencken had seemed radical; in the '30s, hidebound. In the decades that followed, he was something else again—quaint. By 1955, the year before his death, friend and fellow journalist Alistair Cooke could suggest that Mencken was no serious writer at all but rather “a humorist. He helped along this misconception by constantly reminding people that he was a critic of ideas, which was true only as the ideas were made flesh. He was, in fact, a humorist by instinct and a superb craftsman by temperament.” That verdict stood for a quarter of a century, even after Charles Fecher's seminal re-evaluation of his political and literary ideas in *Mencken: A Study of His Thought*.

But beginning in 1981, when Mencken's diary was released from the time-lock he had placed it under for 25 years after his death, all of that changed. By then, the sort of language he used in describing Jews and racial minorities was no laughing matter. Moreover, the diary and the memoirs released from 35-year time-locks in 1991 could not be dismissed as japes; here were Mencken's considered reflections for posterity on his life and times. Humorist gave way to controversialist once more, and the critics who bristled at his racial and political heterodoxies soon exhumed Mencken's other works to pronounce them duds, too. If friends like Cooke had unwittingly damned him with faint praise, his enemies now paid the compli-

ment of taking him seriously—even if only to excoriate him.

The detractors insist that Mencken was wrong, spectacularly so, about every major issue to confront the United States since Prohibition: the Depression, which he refused to acknowledge in print until 1931; Hitler's aggression and the plight of Europe's Jews, concerning which he was conspicuously silent; and even, in the realm of pure literature, the merits of Hemingway, Faulkner, and Joyce. Behind the particulars looms a broader indictment: that Mencken was a complacent and incurious bourgeois, blindly faithful to 19th-century notions of *laissez faire* and social Darwinism. Even his agnosticism was conservative in the worst sense, a patrimony from his cigar-merchant father.

Mencken's defenders have an easy time refuting these charges—or at least mitigating them. However uncharitable his words, Mencken's actions toward Jews and blacks were never less than fair and frequently far more: he published black writers in *The American Mercury* when few other respectable journals would do so; he mocked the Ku

As for intellectual laziness, it is a curious complaint to level against a man whose professional works, to say nothing of his private interests, included books devoted to philosophy, linguistics, political theory, comparative religion, ethics, literary criticism, journalism, and even, in collaboration with a pediatrician, child care. If he dissented from what has come to be the academically correct opinion of Hemingway and Faulkner, he was far ahead of the academicians in recognizing the genius of Mark Twain and the sterility of the genteel tradition. It is true, though, that Mencken's views evolved little over the course of his life. His beliefs had ossified by age 25, as he readily admitted.

That the controversy over his reputation continues to burn despite both sides having said about all there is to say would not have surprised Mencken. But he might have been amused to see who is in his corner. Unusually, this literary quarrel cuts across ideological lines, with Mencken's defenders including such strange bedfellows as Joseph Epstein and Gore Vidal, George Weigel and Jack Shafer. His critics run the narrower

most conservative of Mencken's Boswells, plainly disapproves of his subject, who emerges from *The Skeptic* a sub-Nietzschean jerk.

Which brings us to Marion Elizabeth Rodgers and *Mencken: The American Iconoclast*. Hype notwithstanding, her book is no more comprehensive than Hobson's, though it draws upon more sources. But where Rodgers—a lay scholar of Mencken since the day she tripped over a bundle of his love letters in the Goucher College library—shines is in giving us the most recognizably human Mencken to date. Her book can even be judged by its cover, a shot of Mencken the *bon vivant* downing Baltimore's first glass of post-Prohibition beer. The contrast with the dour photo adorning the jackets of the Hobson and Teachout books is revealing.

Rodgers provides the best, as well as the liveliest, up-to-date biography of Mencken—though it would be better still without the abundant typographical errors: *caveat lector*. Where the bad boy of Baltimore is concerned, biographers can be forgiven for emphasizing the negative; Mencken himself believed “the iconoclast proves enough when he proves by his blasphemy that this or that idol is defectively convincing”—no need to raise another to take its place. Rodgers, however, shows that Mencken stood for something after all. Certainly he loved German culture and held firm to an old-fashioned code of honor. But what unified and animated his journalism and criticism alike was his radical devotion to liberty. As he put it in 1922, “My literary theory, like my politics, is based chiefly on one main idea, to wit, the idea of freedom. I am, in brief, a libertarian of the most extreme variety, and know of no human right that is one tenth as valuable as the simple right to utter what seems (at the moment) to be the truth. Take away this right and none other is worth a hoot...”

THE DETRACTORS INSIST THAT MENCKEN WAS WRONG, SPECTACULARLY SO, ABOUT EVERY MAJOR ISSUE TO CONFRONT THE UNITED STATES SINCE PROHIBITION.

Klux Klan and denounced segregation at every turn; and while he refused to be browbeaten into drumming up war with Germany, he aided Jews trying to escape the *Reich* in every way he could, signing affidavits to help refugees emigrate to the United States. When he did write about Jewish persecution, he went further than most journalists of the time—and considerably further than the Roosevelt administration—in asking why the U.S. shouldn't “take in a couple of hundred thousand” German Jews, “or even all of them?”

gamut from Hilton Kramer to Garry Wills. Both camps have representatives among the latest crop of biographers, though not necessarily the ones you might expect. Fred Hobson describes himself as many of the things Mencken most despised—“a southerner, a professor of literature, a political liberal, and an admirer of Franklin D. Roosevelt”—yet *Mencken: A Life* is supremely objective, even to a fault. Hobson finds Mencken a product of his times and wastes little energy condemning him for it. Terry Teachout, on the other hand, nominally the

His political and literary thought cannot—or at any rate should not—be divided. Today, whether as a source of amusement, controversy, or insight, the political writings overshadow his earlier work as a critic. But it was in that capacity that he first made his mark beyond the newsrooms of Baltimore. In his monthly reviews for *The Smart Set* and his 1917 *Book of Prefaces*, Mencken waged a one-man culture war against the regnant school of thought that held the purpose of literature to be moral edification. For Mencken, always skeptical of higher values, the purpose of literature was simply to show life as it is, in all its amorality. He championed writers who seemed to share this belief, most notably Theodore Dreiser, who by the standards of the day was considered risqué—indeed, his books were subject to being banned from the mails and suppressed by the New York Society for the Prevention of Vice. Such measures forced Mencken to carry his campaign beyond the review pages and into the courts. On both fronts, he won.

His most famous victory came in the “Hatrack” case of 1926, with which Rodgers opens her biography. The incident, which put Mencken himself in the dock, concerned a nonfiction story by Herbert Asbury—since more famous for writing *The Gangs of New York*—that ran in the April issue of *The American Mercury*. Asbury related the tale of a small-town prostitute shunned by the local churches who took her clients to graveyards for their trysts—Protestants to the Catholic cemetery and Catholics to the Masonic one, so as not to cause scandal. The story was cheap and vulgar, and Mencken, as editor of the *Mercury*, thought little of it. But, hard up for copy, he published it anyway.

Once he did, the New England Watch and Ward Society—whose leader, Rev. Franklin Chase, had long been a butt of Mencken’s derision—pounced, warning

No actual al-Qaeda terrorists have been identified and caught, but some American journalists might have been among the targets of the post-9/11 presidential order

to the National Security Agency (NSA) to tap terrorist communications secretly without judicial oversight. Given the imminence of the threat, the White House’s panicked response was understandable, but anyone who has worked in the intelligence community knows that teltap operations start with collecting and analyzing large volumes of raw data. Very few al-Qaeda members were known, much less their cellphone numbers, which meant that the investigation was of necessity wide in scope, seeking to establish linkages through identified individuals regarded by the U.S. government as extremists. NSA has admitted that the investigation was not limited to known al-Qaeda operatives and, according to one source, was a fishing expedition that sought to look at many individuals quickly. As is often the case where hard intelligence is lacking, many of the targets were little more than vaguely defined persons of interest who seldom had actual connections to terrorist groups. Some were contacts or sources for journalists in the United States who were working on terrorism stories and who were in turn linked to the ostensible targeting of al-Qaeda when their numbers came up on telephone logs. The presence of a number of American journalists in the investigative pool was undoubtedly a major reason the government chose not to apply to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court for authorization for the teltaps in the first place, as it would have raised both First and Fourth Amendment issues.



America’s Persian Gulf emirate allies have been watching the Iraqi elections warily and have begun making contingency plans against a much greater threat than that posed by deposed dictator Saddam Hussein.

Baghdad has been the traditional enemy of countries like Kuwait, but there are concerns that a break-up of Iraq will lead to worse evils, most notably the creation of a Shi’ite rump state that will effectively be controlled by the Iranians. According to defense sources in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, contingency planning is now focused on the threat from a united Iran and Shi’ite Iraq. Saudi Arabia is also engaged in similar planning. There is also a growing perception that Tehran poses an additional threat through its program to develop nuclear resources, particularly as Israel has made clear its intention to strike against the Iranian nuclear reactor at Bushehr. If that were to take place, Iran almost certainly would retaliate by carrying out its stated intention to attack Israel and use intermediate-range missiles and its air force to strike all targets in the region that are linked to the U.S., which would include bases in Iraq, Camp Doha in Kuwait, Central Command in Qatar, and the Navy base in Bahrain, drawing the United States into the conflict. It would also undoubtedly unleash a wave of terrorism throughout the region and against the U.S. There are also civil-defense concerns. A bombed reactor could result in a Chernobyl-type meltdown that would produce contamination disastrous to the entire Gulf region.

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a partner in Cannistraro Associates.

newsdealers in Massachusetts that the story contravened state obscenity laws and threatening anyone who sold the magazine with prosecution. When Mencken received word of this, he resolved to go to Massachusetts himself—both on principle and, no doubt, with an eye toward publicity—and sell a copy on the Boston Common. A circus ensued. Chase himself was soon on hand to buy the magazine and have Mencken arrested. Editor traded *Mercury* for 50-cent coin—which he bit, for good measure—and was promptly hauled off to the police station and booked.

He expected a protracted legal battle, and stakes were high not only for the *Mercury*, which stood to be prohibited in other jurisdictions and barred from the mail, but also for Mencken, who faced jail time. But in the event, the judge, after reading the magazine for himself, threw out the case. Boston's intelligentsia feted Mencken as a hero of free speech, and symbolically at least the victory helped bring down Comstockery and censorship laws nationwide. Mencken did not emerge from the episode entirely unscathed: the *Mercury* had lost some \$20,000 in court costs, perhaps ten times that much in today's money, and the Post Office did indeed suppress the April issue. But the Watch and Ward was discredited, and before long Chase was dead, killed, as legend has it, by the strain of the battle.

The "Hatrack" affair was a *cause célèbre* on the order of the Scopes trial of a few years before—in which Mencken had also played a role, not least by christening it the "Monkey Trial"—and afforded Mencken an outright triumph. But what he might have made of the long-term consequences of his victory over Comstockery is open to question. Years before publishing Asbury's story, he had lamented that "The American puella is no longer naive and charming; she goes to the altar of God with a

learned and even cynical glitter in her eye. The veriest school-girl of today knows as much as the midwife of 1885." He objected to this, he wrote, not on moral but aesthetic grounds. All the same, his personal views were more conservative than his political and literary principles might suggest.

To his enemies, Mencken was "the idol of the earthly, sensual, devilish elements of our country," as the Anti-Saloon League of Virginia once declared. And in fact, he did have a dash of the lothario about him: not for nothing was he known to a few friends as "the German Valentino." Hobson and Rodgers devote considerable room in their biographies to his many lady friends—actresses, aspiring writers, Follies girls, and more. But Mencken was no libertine and had little patience with those who were. His friendship with Sinclair Lewis was strained to the breaking point by Lewis's dipsomania and shabby behavior. And he found repugnant Dreiser's adulteries and prodigious womanizing—while she lived with her husband, hardly a day went by that Mrs. Dreiser did not come home to find lipstick prints here and discarded brassieres there. The married Mencken, by contrast, was impeccably faithful to his wife in their five years together.

As for salacious literature, while he defended Dreiser's controversial novel *The "Genius"* and fought against the censorship even of such works of dubious worth as Asbury's story, he did not believe all things permissible in the name of art. He was dismayed when Dreiser sent him a play he had written about—in Hobson's words—a "sexually depraved murderer." "I say the subject is forbidden, and I mean it," he wrote to his friend. "It is all very well enough to talk of artistic freedom, but it must be plain that there must be a limit in the theatre, as in books." Where certain subjects were concerned, "The very mention of

them is banned by that convention on which the whole of civilized order depends."

In other respects, too, there could be a surprisingly traditionalist side to Mencken, one little remarked upon in his biographies. This was a man, after all, who lived his entire life in the city of his birth and spent most of it in his childhood home, 1524 Hollins Street. Even his garish attitude toward religion had its limits—though he would have no truck with any theology, he spared older, more liturgical churches much of the invective he heaped upon relatively recent, enthusiastic denominations. Critics accused him of being soft on Catholicism—he withheld the brunt of his fury from his family's ancestral Lutheranism, too—and, like Santayana, he could enjoy the charm of old Christendom. In 1920, he concluded an appreciation of the high Middle Ages with the observation that "Religions ... like castles, sunsets and women, never reach their maximum of beauty until they are touched by decay."

Mencken's longtime friend Philip Goodman offered another interpretation of Mencken's apparent weakness for liturgical faiths, if we can trust the account of the embittered Charles Angoff, Mencken's former assistant on *The American Mercury*. "Mencken is a lickspittle, like all Germans. He loves authority. The more authority an institution has the more he likes it," Goodman purportedly told him. Angoff's motives notwithstanding, there is probably some truth in the remark. Mencken did adore Germany and did indeed respect certain kinds of authority—in part because of his low opinion of democracy. His libertarianism was unabashedly of the elitist variety, concerned with the freedom of the noble man as much as with the nobility of the free man, as Michael Wreszin observed in relation to one of Mencken's contemporaries.

"All government," he once wrote, "in its essence, is a conspiracy against the superior man." In a democracy, that was doubly true. "I can be only an indifferent citizen of a democratic state," he confessed in 1922, "for democracy is grounded upon the instinct of inferior men to herd themselves in large masses, and its principal manifestation is their bitter opposition to all free thought. In the United States, in fact, I am commonly regarded as a violent anti-patriot." He hardly exaggerated—during the First World War, Mencken came under suspicion of being an agent of the kaiser. He wasn't, and unlike many German-Americans Mencken endured little harassment. But the spectacle of a putatively free press truckling to George Creel and the proliferation of patriotic groups like the Boy Spies of America and the American Protective League sickened him and served to confirm his beliefs about the place of liberty in a democracy. "The kinds of courage I really admire are not whooped up in war, but cried down, and indeed become infamous," he wrote.

Fifty years after his death, Mencken's journalism still entertains and provokes; his literary criticism—once *avant-garde*, now rather old-fashioned—holds up well; and his life retains enough interest to warrant a few more biographies beyond the ones we already have. But in the midst of a perpetual war on terror, with critics of the president once again branded unpatriotic, Mencken's timeliest quality remains his bedrock principles, particularly his commitment to civil liberty in times of hysteria—and regardless of popular opinion. Would that we could bargain with Hades and trade him for a Judy Miller or a David Frum. But as it is, we can content ourselves with Mencken's works, and be thankful that Marion Rodgers has reminded us of a time when at least one journalist held to an unswerving commitment to liberty, Comstocks and Creels be damned. ■

Political Climate

The success of democracy may depend less on culture than geography.

By Nabil O. Al-Khowaiter

WHEN STAFF SGT. Larry Simmons, a Floridian from a Marine reconnaissance unit, saw the Euphrates River for the first time on March 23, 2003, he was not impressed. *Guardian* correspondent James Meek quotes him as saying, "You learn about the Euphrates in geography class, and you get here and you think: 'This is the Euphrates? Looks like a muddy creek to me.'" Indeed, his words were true. Just as the Euphrates today "looks like a muddy creek," the Iraq of today is but a shadow of the magnificent ancient civilizations that once thrived on its banks. One wonders, then, what happened to the Euphrates and what happened to Iraq—or as it was once known, Mesopotamia—that could have brought it down to this level.

The scientific evidence that has accumulated over the last 40 years indicates that the fate of Iraq, as well as the fate of many other once prosperous regions around the world, has been tied closely to major changes in their climates. In fact, we may very well be on the verge of a Copernican revolution in the way historians study and analyze the rise and fall of civilizations. In an April *New Yorker* article, "The Climate of Man-II," Elizabeth Kolbert lists four different civilizations, from the 4,300 year old Akkadian Empire of modern Iraq to the A.D. 750 Mayan civilization of Central America, whose collapse has been firmly tied by scientific evidence to climate changes that led to prolonged droughts. Anthropologists like Brian Fagan and

Jared Diamond, with support from climatologists like Hubert Lamb, have been at the forefront of this movement to reinterpret human history through the lens of climate.

Much of this research and evidence is also relatively new, having been gathered mainly in the 1990s from soil samples and undersea core analyses. As the scientific evidence about the role of climate change in the rise and fall of human societies from the dawn of history to the present day accumulates and comes closer to the 21st century, will it also address the thorny issues of the day regarding the clash of civilizations and ideas? What if the rise of the West and the demise of the East over the last 500 years was due to climate change and not to the superiority of any particular ideas developed in the West? Furthermore, what if the very ideas that evolved in the West, like representative government and universal suffrage, were a reflection of societal distributions of wealth that happened as a result of climate-induced economic changes?

What then does this say about the pitiful state of the modern Middle East today, with its grinding poverty at one level and its autocratic governments at another? Should Arabs today tell Shakespeare's Cassius that he was wrong to say, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars / But in ourselves, that we are underlings." Maybe, just maybe, the overwhelming reason for the lack of economic and political development in the

Arab world today is a result of centuries of drought conditions that did not allow local agricultural-based economies to create an adequate surplus to cover the cost of local government.

It would appear that ever since the demise of the Arab-Nabatean civilization (800 B.C.-A.D. 100), average rainfall in the Middle East has been declining to the present day. Evidence of the Middle East's past agricultural abundance is everywhere to be seen today, from the Nabatean ruins of Madaen Salih and Petra in the deserts of Western Saudi Arabia and Jordan to the ruins of Sumer

to be a positive correlation between the level of democracy in different Islamic countries and the amount of rain they receive per year. Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Turkey, and to a certain extent Iran and Pakistan, are all countries with overwhelming Muslim, albeit non-Arab, populations that are ruled by fairly representative, if not liberal-democratic, systems of government. On the other hand, the 21 far more arid Arab Muslim countries, with the notable exception of relatively non-arid Lebanon, are all autocracies. Furthermore, non-Arab but arid and Muslim Afghanistan

inating a country's political and economic life. Even when most agricultural land is owned by small elites, this rule seems to apply. That is the main reason that many autocratic governments that came to power in the 20th century sought to establish their dominance by first eliminating the landholding classes, small or big. From the Stalinist and Maoist persecution and starvation of the Ukrainian and Chinese peasants to the milder "land reforms" carried out by Nasser in Egypt and the former Shah in Iran against large landowners, the objective was always to eliminate the economic independence of a class of people who could challenge the center. In the case of Iraq, the control of the central government over oil resources, which became a major source of income from the mid-1960s, allowed it to accumulate exponentially more economic—and by extension coercive—power than any local Iraqi agricultural community could resist.

For this reason, talk of bringing democracy to the Middle East, whether through American-sponsored TV and radio or on the back of American tanks, is meaningless if the underlying economic balance of power is skewed toward central governments. Whatever we say today about the British and French colonization of the Middle East in the first half of the 20th century, we must not forget that they left Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria with functioning and fairly representative parliaments. How likely is it that a functioning parliament in present-day Iraq will survive after America withdraws her troops? For all the political careers in Washington hinging on wishful thinking, it would be the unlikely triumph of hope over history. ■

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LOOKING AT A BROADER PICTURE OF THE WORLD, IS IT MERELY COINCIDENCE THAT AROUND 90 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S DEMOCRACIES FALL IN THE TEMPERATE ZONES NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR?

and Babylon in Iraq. At the height of the Roman Empire, Syria was the granary of the empire, while today it can barely feed itself. According to the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, the population of Syria declined by 30 percent from the 16th to the 18th centuries, with around 88 percent of the villages around Aleppo disappearing into the desert. Compounding the effect of drier, hotter weather conditions in the Middle East was the increase in warm-weather diseases, such as malaria and cholera, which, as William McNeil has pointed out in his 1976 book *Plagues and Peoples*, played a critical role in the depopulation over the centuries of many areas of the world.

Looking at a broader picture of the world, is it merely coincidence that around 90 percent of the world's democracies fall in the temperate zones north and south of the equator? Even more interesting with respect to arguments about whether Islam is compatible with democracy is the fact that there appears

has always been ruled by an autocracy of one form or the other, with the Taliban regime being just the last in a string of autocratic governments.

Outside the Arab world, can anyone argue that the United States is not more democratic than relatively more arid Mexico or that until the 1980s, the wetter North European countries like Denmark and Germany were more democratic than the south European countries like Spain, Italy, and Greece?

The circumstantial evidence that has accumulated over the last 200 years indicates that a necessary but not sufficient condition for the development of a representative system of government is the presence of rainfall in quantities plentiful enough to support agricultural production beyond a subsistence level. Perhaps the ability of agricultural communities far away from a central capital to support local self-government through a local agricultural surplus plays a role in preventing an autocratic central authority from completely dom-

Rousseau Was Wrong

The freedom-promoting foreign policy of the Bush administration rests on the assumption that democracy is the natural condition of human beings and that

undemocratic societies are survivals of a past that progress has not yet corrected.

Everyone understands that energy supplies, geopolitical security, corporate interests and ideology, and the demands of domestic political constituencies all are factors in the administration's policy decisions. The president and his men would nonetheless claim that the principle driving American policy is the promulgation of democracy—encouraging “liberty on the march!” in one of Bush's favorite oratorical exclamations.

This is meant to be highly edifying, and would be, were it not for the fact that the assumption is false. Near the end of his long life, the American diplomat and historian George Kennan wrote: “To have real self-government, a people must understand what that means, want it, and be willing to sacrifice for it.” He said that there always will only be a few democracies, and he was right.

He added—with stony realism—that the other societies must be left “to be governed or misgoverned as habit or tradition may dictate, asking of their governing cliques only that they observe, in their bilateral relations with us and with the remainder of the world community, the minimum standards of civilized diplomatic intercourse.”

The second president of the United States, John Adams, wrote, “There never was a democracy that did not commit suicide.” That judgment obviously remains open concerning today's democracies—even the United States.

The Bush “march of freedom” has begun badly in Iraq. It is not doing very well in Georgia and Ukraine, either. The struggle of clans and personalities has already betrayed some of the grand expectations held a year ago. Those two “revolutions” were actually elections precipitated by persistent popular demonstrations against existing regimes, carried out under international observation, placing pro-American figures in office. The popular movements promoting these elections usually were led by young democracy activists, often trained in Washington, with funds and equipment supplied by the U.S. government or one or another of the dozens of American pro-democracy NGOs. However, power tends to continue in the hands of clan alliances, with politics manipulated, if more subtly than before. One hopes that this will not last, but it is likely to do so.

Democracy is not the natural condition of society. It is produced by values learned from historical experience or philosophical speculation. It is difficult to achieve and hard to maintain. It depends not on free elections but on a series of developments in civil society. These include general acceptance of the principles of majority government and alternation of power and that political differences must be settled or accommodated non-lethally. It means agreement that civil law must prevail in disputes involving even the powerful, that the distinction between public and private property must be defended, and that speech and the press must be free. This

democratic culture is the consequence of experience and education. It is not a political program easily imported.

The idea that democracy is inherent reflects that naïve confidence in predestined human progress that came out of the Enlightenment and inspired the French and American revolutions.

Aristotle, in antiquity, condemned democracy as easily destroyed by demagogic corruption. Montesquieu and Hegel, in the 18th and 19th centuries, considered democracy already a system of the past, proven inherently too unstable to provide good government. Only the direct or indirect intellectual descendants of the romantic political and social theorist Jean-Jacques Rousseau still believe that man in his natural state is virtuous and altruistic, born a democrat. Unfortunately, those children of Rousseau include most of the most powerful people in the United States today, from the Bush White House and the neoconservative think tanks to their Democratic Party counterparts, including the liberal intelligentsia of American universities.

They fail to understand that this is a doomed program. It rests fundamentally on the destruction of stability, yet it is incapable of installing lasting democratic order. Iraq was intended to be the paradigm for the democratization of the Middle East, then of the peoples of the former Soviet Union, and then Russia itself—and perhaps beyond.

Instead, Iraq has proven the prototype for what is likely to happen elsewhere. The old order, whether good or bad, will be destroyed, usually at heavy cost to the people. What follows, more often than not, will be chaotic disorder. ■

William Pfaff writes from Paris. Copyright the International Herald Tribune.

Arts & Letters

FILM

[Munich]

Executioner's Song

By Steve Sailer

CONSERVATIVES HAVE MUCH reason to complain about the movie industry, but it could be worse. For example, the critics' darling is the morally irresponsible Quentin Tarantino, yet within Hollywood, he is treated as an amusing lightweight. Instead, the most prestigious and influential figure is the director, producer, and former executive Steven Spielberg.

An Eagle Scout who earned a remarkable 48 merit badges, Spielberg's lack of alienation from traditional American values has always disturbed the culturati, who assume that *épater le bourgeois* should be the essential goal of any artist. Indeed, Spielberg may have been the most effective critic of the sexual revolution. The son of divorced parents, Spielberg's favorite theme has been the pain caused to children by their parents' self-indulgence. (He is on his second wife, actress Kate Capshaw, but perhaps his private life, like Ronald Reagan's, should be judged by Hollywood's standards.)

As Paul Johnson noted in his *History of the Jews*, it's common for assimilated, crowd-pleasing Jews to turn back toward Jewish questions as they age. This process has added depth to the later work of Spielberg, who at age 59 describes himself as a moderately observant Jew.

Spielberg's softheaded politics, while slightly right-of-center for Hollywood, are very much in the mainstream of Jewish liberalism. I've come to appreciate them more over the last few years as we've seen the damage done by the neo-conservative and neoliberal war hawks.

Spielberg might bear some indirect responsibility for America's pointless wars in Kosovo and Iraq. Few 1990s movies had more emotional influence on the Washington punditariat than "Schindler's List" and "Saving Private Ryan." The former made baby boomer policy wonks want to fight genocide like Schindler, and the latter left them feeling distressingly inferior to their fathers of the "The Greatest Generation." Thus, the neolib and neocons went looking for their own Hitlers to fight—well, they didn't want to fight them personally, but they definitely wanted other people's sons to go smite Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein for them.

"Munich," though, is being denounced by the neocons for the crime of ambivalence about Israel. Unlike the smug leftist tract "Syriana," an unfunny "Fahrenheit 9-11" that blames all the troubles of the Middle East on Big Oil, "Munich" reflects the centrality and complexity of Israel's role.

"Munich" begins at the 1972 Olympic games, where eight Black September terrorists massacred 11 Israeli Olympians. Golda Meir's government then authorized the assassination of Palestinian leaders who might, or might not, have been involved, but the subsequent details remain in dispute. The movie follows George Jonas's uncorroborated 1984 book *Vengeance* about a purported five-man death squad sent by Mossad to Western Europe. Eric Bana, the tall, sensitive, and ineffectual-looking Croatian-Australian actor who played Hector in "Troy," stars as their leader.

"Munich" skips the 1973 mistaken identity fiasco in Lillehammer, Norway, where Mossad agents gunned down an innocent Moroccan waiter. Moreover, the film, like Jonas's book, attributes the wetwork gang's inside dope on the location of their targets to a business arrangement with "Le Group," a preposterous French family firm of freelance spies, presumably to distract us from the more plausible ways that Mossad might have obtained leads, such as torture.

Still, Spielberg views revenge as a dirty job, where much can go wrong. Four of the agents become conflicted. Should Jews, of all people, they agonize, take an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth? Only one killer is so cold-blooded and ethnocentric as to snarl, "The only blood I care about is Jewish blood." And to underscore the near-Nazi reprehensibility of this view, Spielberg cast the blond-haired, blue-eyed, Teutonic-looking Daniel Craig, the English actor recently hired to be the next James Bond.

To express his queasy uncertainty about the murder mission, Spielberg trades in his usual bluish-gray color scheme for a sickly greenish-gray cast. "Munich" is grim and often grueling, but just when you begin to lose patience, Spielberg inserts some brilliant bits of entertainment.

Nonetheless, "Munich" is unlikely to please a large audience. The true believers on both sides will be infuriated by Spielberg's evenhandedness. And those without a dog in this fight may feel that while they approve of vengeance in the abstract, they no more want to watch it being carried out than death-penalty supporters want to attend public hangings. ■

Rated R for strong graphic violence, some sexual content, nudity, and language.

BOOKS

[*Literary Giants, Literary Catholics*, Joseph Pearce, Ignatius Press, 425 pages]

The Pen and the Cross

By R.J. Stove

JOSEPH PEARCE'S CAREER, at least as gleaned from public sources, is almost a Chesterton fantasia in itself. From a poor, increasingly Pakistani-dominated London suburb, he first emerged during the late 1970s as a young activist in Britain's National Front, in those days a feared, albeit odious, organization rather than the bunch of perennial losers it afterwards became. Eventually the irony-challenged Thatcher government decided to give the NF not a Bronx cheer but a martyr's crown. Charging Pearce with "inciting racial hatred," it condemned him to the slammer twice, in 1982 and again in 1986.

These insouciant exercises in nanny-statism—Pearce spent much of his jail time in solitary confinement—had consequences neither Pearce nor anybody else could have predicted. One well-wisher sent a rosary to his cell—and he began a self-imposed course of wide reading, notably in Belloc, Chesterton, and C.S. Lewis. Having abandoned the NF, Pearce discovered that he had an uncommon gift for conveying often abstruse theological topics. A Catholic since 1989, he teaches now at Florida's Ave Maria University, when not editing the *St. Austin Review*. And every year he seems to issue at least one new book.

Literary Giants, Literary Catholics differs from Pearce's earlier publications in that it comprises essays that have already appeared in *Chronicles*, *Gilbert Magazine*, *This Rock*, *Catholic World Report*, and a dozen other periodicals, including *TAC*. Most of its essays

are short, some being fewer than four pages long, although one takes up more than 30 pages. Many are perhaps best interpreted as trailers, or teasers, for the full-length biographies—concerning Tolkien, Oscar Wilde, and Roy Campbell, as well as the three apologists mentioned above—that Pearce has already produced. Sadly, Ignatius Press nowhere cites the original sources for this material, sources which Pearce also has failed to provide ("My memory is no longer equal to the task of remembering which articles appeared in which journals," he admits in his acknowledgments section.)

At least no one can quarrel with the range of Pearce's interests. He has tended to concentrate on a specific time and place—early-to-mid 20th-century England—where, one gathers, his main devotion lies. As against that, he remains among the very few modern commentators who have written with understanding of Solzhenitsyn. His pleasurable variety is matched by a pleasurable style: plain, clear, no-nonsense. If only the term "stolid" lacked insulting connotations, it would describe Pearce's idiom well. He shuns the faintest suggestion of that ghastly frivolity which is English Catholics' national vice, and which makes whole tracts of Ronald Knox almost unbearable. Perhaps the nadir of postwar English Catholicism came when Knox, having obtained the signal honor of a private audience with Pius XII, proceeded to lecture His Holiness about ... the Loch Ness Monster. In Pearce's thought processes, even when they inspire occasional disagreement—see below—there are no Loch Ness Monsters.

Any volume with a title like *Literary Giants, Literary Catholics* will have the genial, elephantine shadow of Chesterton looming over it. Sure enough, Chapter 9 of this volume provides as neat an epitome of GKC's life, philosophy, and importance as can ever have been written. Notable above all is its stress on how Chesterton influenced later apologists, a fact insufficiently emphasized in many more ambitious accounts of the man.

For Lewis, as Pearce insists, "Chesterton had more sense than all the other moderns put together." Dorothy L. Sayers—who never formally joined the Roman Catholic Church—also acknowledged, with fervor, Chesterton's impact. It is good to be reminded by Pearce that Chesterton wrote *The Everlasting Man* partly "as a refutation of [H. G.] Wells's case" in *The Outline of History*—the case, that is, for Christophobic, Europhobic, Third World-glorifying, pagan agitprop. (Felipe Fernández-Armesto afterwards peddled similar agitprop, with a somewhat thicker simulacrum of scholarly etiquette, in works like *Millennium*.) Pearce has of course comprehensively exploded, in other contexts, the myth of Chesterton's and Belloc's anti-Semitism. It would be pleasant to think that this myth was now confined to Abe Foxman's and Lyndon LaRouche's respective shadowlands. But no: it blooms anew in the recent *Dictionary of National Biography*, a weird throwback to Clinton-era political correctness. So Pearce's chapter called "Fascism and Chesterton" merits special study.

Pearce's other topics include Waugh; T.S. Eliot; Dame Edith Sitwell; England's World War I protest poets, particularly Siegfried Sassoon, who—like Dame Edith—converted to Catholicism in old age; Shakespeare; Dante, about whom more in a moment; Graham Greene (ah well); Muggeridge (hmmmm ...); Hollywood; and Christmas. If Muggeridge must be praised at all—and one does wish that Muggeridge's outright heresies, such as his printed denial of the Virgin Birth as late as 1987, could be honestly conceded rather than huffily ignored—Pearce's way is the best way to do it. Correctly, Pearce compliments Gregory Wolfe's 1995 life of Muggeridge for its diligence, thoroughness, and—Pearce's words—"eloquence, without ever compromising the highest standards of scholarship." He also observes that Richard Ingrams's contemporaneous, and arrogantly titled, *Muggeridge: The Biography* "barely pa[id] lip service to scholarly standards of annotation and source citation." These standards

being—as Pearce’s politeness prevents him from spelling out—anathema to the whole Ingrams mindset, with its glorification of ink-stained amateurism and its loathing of scholastic competence.

Chapters 30 to 47 consist mostly of Tolkien analyses, with occasional excursions into Lewis’s “Inkling” milieu, including a delightful portrait of Lewis’s fellow Inkling Owen Barfield. Familiar to readers of *Surprised By Joy*, Barfield died in 1997 when a mere stripling of 99. Pearce met him not long before the end. “I realized,” says Pearce, “as those eyes met mine that the decaying body was merely an inadequate shell for the immortal soul.”

Regarding Tolkien: here, launching timidly and vertiginously into the first person, I must declare a fault which may well scandalize at least half of *TAC*’s readership. I can no longer read any Tolkien; have never finished any of his books except—under duress—*The Fellowship of the Ring*; and have never been inspired by Tolkien to any emotion except sheepish ennui. Therefore I must take on trust Pearce’s glowing assessment of JRRT’s *magnum opus*. Evidently *Lord of the Rings* means more to

would we have believed it. The championing of Tolkien by hippies, whom he would have rejected with the most blatant scorn, has implications for those who confuse other artists with such artists’ more asinine groupies. (Wagner, anyone?) Clearly Tolkienophiles will need Pearce’s latest exegeses to devour, to digest, and doubtless to argue about.

Parts of *Literary Giants*, *Literary Catholics* prompt reservations. T.S. Eliot’s early reproofs of Milton are quoted with reverence, but Eliot’s eventual recantation of these reproofs is not. Neither are the defenses of Milton by critics Charles Williams and William Empson, against the smart-aleck Blake epigrams which Pearce does mention—“the devil’s party without knowing it,” and so forth. In fact, Milton seems to inspire all of Pearce’s very few errors. “Milton,” Pearce asserts, “descends from the positive to the negative.” Where does that leave *Paradise Regained*?

Other drawbacks are sins of omission rather than of commission. Take Pearce’s encomium to Dante. Yes, the more people intelligently read Dante, the better; but Pearce skirts the whole question of how we can read it if we

depravity of which Orwell exposed in one of his most celebrated articles, “Benefit of Clergy.” No suggestion of this depravity’s extent informs Pearce’s account. Catholic teaching to the Catholic faithful concerning mortal sin, as Pearce well knows—although non-Catholic readers might not know—binds firmly and explicitly: public sins require public penances. Did Dali do public penance for his memoirs? Maybe he did, but Pearce mentions no such *mea culpa*.

Again, and perhaps more grievously, Pearce’s justifiable praise for Catholic Distributism refers in passing to sculptor and typographer Eric Gill. Sorry, but if you are a Catholic, you do not want Gill as a public presence on your team. Given *TAC*’s family-oriented readership, I shall avoid spelling out Gill’s more emetic carnal practices, chronicled in print since 1989, other than to hint that no sister, daughter, or dog in Gill’s habitat was a safe sister, daughter, or dog. Catholicism’s long and dreadful list of recent sex scandals should make all Catholic spokesmen hyper-vigilant about avoiding even the merest suspicion of cover-ups.

Otherwise, Pearce’s erudition and lucidity deserve not only deference but enthusiasm. *Literary Giants*, *Literary Catholics* arrives at a time that greatly needs something like it. In 2004, thousands of us writers, Catholic and Protestant alike, voiced hopes that “The Passion of the Christ”—treated to a particularly touching Pearce meditation—would fan a great religious revival. We can now comprehend that such hopes belonged, barring a miracle, to the realms of daydream. The slough of despond looks a damnably tempting place right now. Pearce wants to arm his readers with weapons that can help resist that slough. His pen serves Christ’s Cross. America is lucky to have Pearce. But then Pearce is lucky to have America, the only English-speaking land where official Catholicism uses the words “intellectual” and “convert” as something nobler than terms of abuse. ■

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NOBODY EVER TOLD EITHER THE FLOWER-CHILDREN OR ME THAT THE CHARACTER OF GALADRIEL ALLUDES TO THE VIRGIN MARY.

him than even the Chesterbelloc does. If a Catholic Tolkienophobe may respectfully address a Tolkienophile, I would point out the oft-forgotten fact that although millions of Catholics now regard Tolkienophilia as an article of faith, this is an extremely recent phenomenon. During my 1970s adolescence—Pearce and I were both born in 1961—his cultists consisted largely and perhaps wholly of hirsute flower-children, beards imperative for both sexes, who regarded *LOTR* as a 1,000-page acid trip. Hobbits, man, forests, man, far-out, man, groovy, man. Nobody ever told either the flower-children or me that the character of Galadriel alludes to the Virgin Mary. Nor, if we had been told it,

either lack adeptness in Italian or have lost what limited adeptness we ever had. And yes, Sayers’s Dante translation is a wonder of Bach-like ingenuity; yet can it be a substitute for the original language, any more than piano arrangements of Beethoven symphonies can be for top-flight live orchestral performances?

The remaining complaints, small but not trivial, appear to derive from Pearce being simply too nice a man. His tribute to Salvador Dali—who after settling in America reverted to Catholicism—ends thus: “in the important things in life, he stood up to be counted ... for the most part, he was on the side of the angels and the saints.” Fine, except for the little matter of Dali’s 1942 memoirs, the

[*Auden and Christianity*, Arthur Kirsch, Yale University Press, 240 pages]

The Faith of the Poet

By James Bowman

"IN EACH OF US, there is a bit of a Catholic and a bit of a Protestant," Arthur Kirsch quotes the poet W.H. Auden as saying. "For truth is catholic, but the search for it is protestant." This must be the central text for any understanding of Auden's Christianity, for it shows him as being, as he surely was, a thoroughgoing Protestant himself, a believing Kierkegaardian for whom faith always meant working out his own salvation in fear and trembling—or at least with a mighty effort of intellect and spirit. The idea is a congenial one to our times, as well as having that smack of slightly bogus profundity in which Auden's poetry also tends to specialize. But this reader would have liked the author, who is an emeritus professor of English at the University of Virginia, to strive for just a bit more detachment, a bit of critical distance from his subject, in what is otherwise a fine study of Auden's spiritual life.

For there is something slightly glib in a distinctively Audenian way about that quotation, something that almost reduces religion to the banality of Robert Louis Stevenson's dictum that "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour." In other words, if you can't believe in the destination, then belief in the aimless journey can serve as a consolation prize. Most people, I think, are left wondering what there is to be hopeful about if the arrival is thus quietly dropped and the journey is all that is left. It sounds just a little too much like the sort of studied optimism in which a certain strain of Victorian thought rather specialized—a way of cheering ourselves up because we know we really

have nothing to be cheerful about.

As a poet, too, Auden's problem was always one of glibness. There was the famous incident of Orwell's devastating put-down of the most notorious line of Auden's pre-Christian, pro-Communist period—Auden's remark about "the conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder"—which elicited from Orwell the retort that "Mr Auden's brand of amorality is only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled." Orwell was writing in 1940 and doubtless also glancing at the fact that Auden was by then safe in America while Britain was fighting for her life. To his credit, Auden bitterly regretted the line and some others written at the same time. He also tried to volunteer for the American armed services after Pearl Harbor, but as an open homosexual he must have known there was little likelihood of his having to serve.

Perhaps the most famous bit of glibness from Auden's Christian period—which seems to have begun more or less coincidentally with the outbreak of the war and which lasted to the end of his life—was the line quoted by President Johnson against Barry Goldwater in the now notorious "daisy" ad he ran during the campaign of 1964: "We must love one another or die." As Randall Jarrell pointed out, this was a silly thing to say, since we must love one another *and* die. But Auden was at least ashamed of the political use to which his line was put. On Professor Kirsch's showing, Auden's Christianity was an excuse to display his own compassion while taking a voyeur's approach to suffering.

Yet somehow neither Auden's poetry nor his religious thinking are vitiated by the taint of moral grandstanding. This is because he is capable of recognizing it in himself, thus suggesting a penitential cast to lines like "abhorred in the Heav'ns are all/self-proclaimed poets who, to wow an/audience, utter some resonant lie" or "nothing is lovely, / Not even in poetry, which is not the case." There is often, too, a kind of charming sincerity even about the poet's occa-

sional pretentiousness, as in the famous lines from "Musée des Beaux Arts" about how the Old Masters

never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom
must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy
spot
Where the dogs go on with their
doggy life and the torturer's
horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a
tree.

These words should be the heralds not of the "age of anxiety," in another of the Audenian formulations that has outlived him—have any people in any age in human history had less cause for anxiety than most people in Western Europe and America in the immediate postwar period?—but the age of publicity and celebrity. Nor could they have been written by anyone but a man who at some level expected the world to be a sort of theatrical exhibition with himself at center-stage, and who could never quite get over the fact that it was not. Like the imperative "attention must be paid" in "Death of a Salesman," such an attitude cries out for the reader to reply: Why? What makes you think yourself entitled to the world's attention anyway?

Such a question probably never occurred to a sentimentalist like Arthur Miller, but Auden seems to have had an answer to it in his Christian belief, which taught him the worth of every human soul in the divine sight. Moreover, his manful acceptance of the view of most Christians of his own time that homosexual relations were inherently sinful made him resistant if not immune to any sense of his own rights and privileges arising out of a still tasteful intimacy with God. "I've come to the conclusion that it's wrong to be queer," Kirsch quotes him as saying to a friend, "but that's a long story. Oh, the reasons why are comparatively simple. In the first place, all homosexual acts are acts of envy. In the second, the more you're involved with someone the more trouble arises, and affection shouldn't result in

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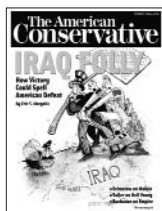
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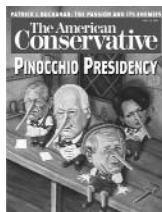


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that. It shows something's wrong somewhere."

It's a typically gnomic Audenian pronouncement, and his handsome approval of traditional teaching is rendered in such a way as to leave open the possibility that he might at a later date and upon further reflection come to quite a different conclusion—as of course other homosexuals have done in the years since his death. Yet somehow I find it hard to believe that it would ever have occurred to Auden that his being a homosexual was in itself an entitlement to respect for his lifestyle from other Christians and even from the institutional Church of England, of which he was a regular communicant. He did live in a sort of "marriage"—albeit a troubled one—with Chester Kallman for over 30 years, and he might have been won over, had he lived to our own time, by the gay-rights agenda. For him, homosexual acts were still sinful, but he did not rely on revelation or traditional teaching for this conviction. He reserved the right to discover it for himself.

On balance, Auden's Christianity remains very much to his credit—and partly because he had the wit to see, as not many others have seen, the revolutionary impact of this belief not just upon the first century Roman Empire but on our own time.

The various 'kerygmas,' of Blake, of Lawrence, of Freud, of Marx, to which, along with most middle-class intellectuals of my generation, I paid attention between twenty and thirty, had one thing in common. They were all Christian heresies; that is to say, one cannot imagine their coming into existence except in a civilization which claimed to be based, religiously, on belief that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and that, in consequence, matter, the natural order, is real and redeemable, not a shadowy appearance or the cause of evil, and historical time is real and significant, not meaningless or an endless series of cycles.

That's why, as compared with the other great world religions, "Jesus convinces me he was right ... he forecast our historical evolution correctly. If we reject the Gospels, then we must reject modern life." Auden would have seen that though we are attacked by Muslims for being Christians—Crusaders and infidels, in their terms—it is beside the point to insist that we're not really Christian anymore and that in fact our secular society has long since abandoned any official role for religious belief. The terrorists themselves point out to a world that has forgotten it the extent to which secular society is the product of religious, and specifically Christian, belief—since only Christianity among the world's religions allowed for the creation of secular society in the first place. The dichotomy between religious and nonreligious realms is and always has been an idiosyncratic Christian idea and is precisely what the terrorists loathe about our society.

In fact, Auden's *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*, to which Kirsch devotes one of his five chapters, could be read as referring as much to the clash between Christianity and Islam as it does to the clash of Christianity and paganism—except that King Herod's enlightened paganism, on Auden's showing, is allowed to be much more liberal and therefore attractive to modern Westerners not only than Herod actually was but than any plausible version of Islamism could ever be. But Auden liked to give the other side the best arguments he could think of on their behalf, which is one reason why, in spite of his glibness and sentimentality, his was a serious intellect as well as a serious poetic talent. Kirsch does a good job of arguing his own case that it was Auden's Christianity that gave him this intellectual and spiritual ballast that he so badly needed, and in a 21st-century university press book, that is truly something to be celebrated. ■

James Bowman is a Resident Scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington and author of the forthcoming book Honor, A History.

[*Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda, Sean Naylor, Berkley Caliber, 425 pages*]

Rumsfeld's Remote-Control War

by Clark Stooksbury

THE MOUNTAINS OF AFGHANISTAN are a less than ideal setting for a war—or for much of anything else. They are remote and very cold; the high altitude and thin air quickly exhaust even young men in excellent physical condition who train relentlessly. These harsh conditions make the mountains an excellent place for a terrorist band to organize and carry out operations against the soft and decadent West. It was perhaps a surprise to Osama bin Laden and his allies when the U.S. military invaded his haven in the fall of 2001 and quickly toppled the Taliban regime—not all Americans were as soft as he had imagined. But after the initial success, the road to victory in Afghanistan became more difficult. In the famed battle of Tora Bora, hundreds of al-Qaeda, possibly including bin Laden himself, escaped into Pakistan.

Operation Anaconda, chronicled by Sean Naylor in *Not a Good Day to Die*, was a follow-up to Tora Bora. Broadly speaking, Naylor's book tells two stories. One is a heroic tale of men at war. The other, less valorous part is an account of bureaucratic bungling by the Pentagon brass that hamstrung the war effort. The upper levels of the military chain-of-command do not fare well in this narrative, Donald Rumsfeld and Gen. Tommy Franks in particular. The primary role of the secretary of defense and the former head of Central Command (CENTCOM)—both with an eye toward a planned October 2002 invasion of Iraq—was to keep American fighting men out of the war zone.

General Franks, who kept tabs on the battle's progress via video conference, also played a role in obstructing Naylor's reporting. While he was still in charge, CENTCOM stonewalled Naylor's attempts to investigate Operation Anaconda by "losing" his Freedom of Information Act request and by banning CENTCOM personnel from discussing the operation with the press. The stonewalling ended after Franks retired in 2004.

But the more problematic figure is the secretary of defense. Donald Rumsfeld came into office with plans to transform the military, most especially the Army. Naylor notes that in the "months prior to September 11, the media had been full of stories suggesting that Rumsfeld was looking to do away with two of the Army's ten active duty divisions and use the savings to fund the development of precision munitions, which he and his advisors viewed as a route to success in future conflicts."

The war in Afghanistan was Rumsfeld's first opportunity to test his theories. In addition to his support for a smaller military in general, he was particularly concerned about the United States being perceived as an imperial

role for the Army, but they failed to convince Rumsfeld. White and Shinseki both had strained relations, at best, with the defense secretary. Naylor interviewed White for this book and reminds the reader that the general was fired by Rumsfeld over a disagreement with him about the Crusader artillery system.

Rumsfeld, who according to White felt that commanders were "sloppy" in the deployment of manpower, vetted every request for additional soldiers. One unit affected by the limits he imposed was a brigade combat team from the 101st Airborne Division. "With all of its components," Naylor explains "a 101st brigade combat team numbered around 5,000 soldiers." That would have put stress on the force-level cap. So when CENTCOM gave the 101st a list of elements it could take, it excluded attack helicopters and artillery.

CENTCOM favored using Air Force bombers to replace artillery because the pilots weren't based in Afghanistan and so didn't affect the force cap. But soldiers on the ground don't like to depend on the Air Force for all of their extra firepower, for numerous reasons. Since they don't "own" it, the Army must

IF CASUALTY FIGURES ARE AN INDICATION, THE TREND-LINE IS MOVING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION. WE LOST A TOTAL OF 96 TROOPS IN 2002 AND 2003—AND 97 THROUGH THE FIRST 11 MONTHS OF 2005.

power in Afghanistan. While that concern was valid, it would have been wise of Rumsfeld to consider the possibility that a larger force on the ground in the early part of the campaign might have allowed us to have a lighter force later on. Our military has been there for four years now, and if casualty figures are an indication, the trend-line is moving in the wrong direction. We lost a total of 96 troops in 2002 and 2003—and 97 through the first 11 months of 2005.

Early in the Afghan campaign, Army Secretary Thomas White and Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki argued for a larger

request the support from the Air Force. Fighters and bombers also have a limited time on station before they must refuel. Air power has other handicaps as well. The AC-130 is one of the Air Force's most powerful close air support weapons—in the dark. When the sun comes up, it is too vulnerable to being shot down to participate in battle.

The reliance on the Air Force would prove to be a problem during the battle as well as an inter-service controversy in the aftermath of Anaconda. It would also lead to difficulties with our Afghan allies when a promised assault by the Air

Force failed to live up to its billing. "The Afghans ... set great store by the Americans' ability to deliver death and destruction on command from the air. ... In an underwhelming display of American firepower, a single B-1B bomber hurtled through the predawn sky, and a grand total of six orange explosions blossomed along the humpback ridgeline. And that was that. The ballyhooed 'fifty-five-minute' bombardment had in fact lasted less than a single minute." "Where are the bombs you promised us?" the Afghans were left to ask.

Operation Anaconda was also hampered by a complex and confusing command structure brought about by the numerous units involved in the fight and the need to co-ordinate with officials in Kuwait and CENTCOM headquarters in Tampa, Florida.

In the heat of battle it was often difficult to tell who was in charge. In one instance, a Navy officer prematurely

assumed command from the Army's Lieutenant Colonel Blaber—whom Naylor describes as "a man whose entire career had prepared him to make the sort of decision Hyder [the Navy officer] now faced"—and ordered a mission that broke a "cardinal rule of reconnaissance" by infiltrating a Navy SEAL team, via helicopter, directly onto an observation post that was occupied by the enemy. Things began to unravel after that fateful decision, and later other

did not defeat them simply by driving them out. Our purpose in that battle was to go in and kill as many of them as possible and hopefully capture or kill high-value targets. It is unclear how many al-Qaeda members were killed in the Shahikot. When the time came to stop them from escaping to Pakistan, our Afghan allies had abandoned their positions along the escape routes. The rest of that 101st Airborne Brigade combat team that Donald Rumsfeld prevented

STEPHEN BIDDLE WROTE THAT IN ANACONDA, "**AL QAEDA DEFENDERS NOT ONLY STOOD THEIR GROUND AGAINST OVERWHELMING AMERICAN FIREPOWER, THEY ACTUALLY REINFORCED THEIR POSITIONS** IN THE MIDST OF THE BATTLE ..."

units would attempt to land in the same spot, unaware that they would be flying right onto an al-Qaeda stronghold.

In this chaos, an Air Force brigadier general in charge of the task force involved in the fighting removed decision-making from the Army officers in the field. He told his staff on Masirah, an island in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Oman, "I have command, you have control." The meaning of those words would be debated in the fallout of Anaconda. At the time, the effect of the decision was that "the fiercest close-range firefight U.S. troops had waged since Mogadishu, a close quarters, take-no-prisoners battle fought on a frozen Afghan mountaintop, would be 'controlled' by officers watching video screens on a desert island and 'commanded' by a man who had made his name flying transport aircraft."

The final results of Operation Anaconda—a stew with many ingredients and even more cooks—were ambiguous at best. Stephen Biddle of the Army War College wrote in a report about the Afghan War that in Anaconda, "al Qaeda defenders not only stood their ground against overwhelming American firepower, they actually reinforced their positions in the midst of the battle ..." The Shahikot valley, where the fighting occurred, was not their country, and we

the Army from deploying in a "sloppy" fashion still sat in Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Clichés about incompetence in the planning and fighting of wars have embedded themselves into the culture via movies and television. The blustering, clownish military officer is a common stereotype. But things often become cliché because they contain at least a grain of truth. The military has colorful acronyms like FUBAR and SNAFU, which disguise colorful language not appropriate for a family publication, to denote the frequency of error in military affairs. In addition to the usual SNAFUs, however, the Bush administration added a couple of specialties that would be evident on a much larger scale in Iraq—a lackadaisical attitude toward the details of force composition combined with a propensity to declare victory too quickly.

Not a Good Day to Die captures those errors along with the heroism and sacrifice of the troops involved. Naylor rescues from the memory hole one important campaign in a war that has faded into the background of the troubled Iraq occupation. ■

Clark Stooksbury has written for The American Enterprise, Chronicles, and Liberty.

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Permission to Speak Freely



Back in February 2003, *The American Conservative* ran an editorial under the heading “Free Taki.” Mind you, it was a shot across the bow of

Scotland Yard’s “Diversity Division,” which was investigating me for an article I had written in the *Spectator* of London about British drug gangs. “The freedom of political speech is one of the bedrock institutions of the West,” we thundered, but it would be stretching it if I now wrote that Scotland Yard got our message and let me go. First of all, I was never arrested, just investigated. I had written that most of the drug gangsters were Afro-Caribbean, just like their fathers and grandfathers. In this, I had echoed the great English historian and polymath Paul Johnson, who had previously written that black immigrants ought to be paid to go back to their country of origin to make room for Asian immigrants.

Throwing people in jail for things they’ve said or written is hardly new. I suppose old Socrates was among the first to be punished in my old hometown of Athens, the state claiming that he was corrupting its youth. Actually he was preaching sedition, but they got him to drink hemlock by threatening to expose him as a Woody Allen type, except for preferring boys.

But selective free speech and democracy for minorities being very in vogue nowadays, I shall stick to recent times. In merry old England last month, for Joe and Helen Roberts, sincere Christians whose principles led them to object very politely to their local council’s policy of promoting gay rights, freedom of speech did not apply. Although they committed no offense, that didn’t stop the council reporting them to the fuzz, who raided their home for two hours, questioning them and then warning them about their non-offense. The Robertses’ views on homosexuality may be unfashionable in

liberal circles but are shared by millions of Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

Another Brit, Maya Evans, was standing at the Cenotaph late last year reading out names of British troops killed in Iraq when no fewer than 14 police officers dragged her away, locked her up, charged and fined her. Some freedom of speech, to paraphrase Winston Churchill.

And for questioning on British radio whether gay couples should adopt boys, author Lynette Burrows was told by police to watch what she said.

In the land of pasta, sunny and civilized Italy, they are no longer after Galileo but after Paolo di Canio, a star footballer who gave a fascist salute to the crowd after scoring a game-winning

Canada, and Australia and has lost his home and declared bankruptcy in Britain after he lost a libel suit against American author Deborah Lipstadt for calling him a Holocaust denier.

About the time Irving was being arrested, another writer, Orhan Pamuk, landed in a Turkish jail, charged with “denigrating Turkishness.” This was about the Turkish massacre of Armenians in 1915, where close to a million Armenians died, something the Turks don’t bring up in polite conversation.

The problem here is that the whole world is up in arms over Pamuk’s arrest but is not exactly breaking down the doors of Irving’s prison. So, do we write Free David Irving and Orhan Pamuk, or do we drop the former because it makes for better public relations? Does freedom of speech mean freedom of views we find acceptable or the views we find convenient? Is selective free speech

DOES FREEDOM OF SPEECH MEAN FREEDOM OF VIEWS WE FIND ACCEPTABLE OR THE VIEWS WE FIND CONVENIENT?

goal. FIFA, the world game’s governing body, banned him for one game and fined him \$12,000, despite FIFA’s president’s insistence he should be banned for life. Banned for life for a salute that goes back to the French Revolutionary period, when the painter David depicted scenes of ancient Rome in which oaths of allegiance were accompanied by that kind of salute? Easy, Trigger!

In neighboring Austria, the controversial historian David Irving has been held—incommunicado for the first week—since Nov. 11. Irving’s crime? Two speeches in Austria in 1989 allegedly denying there were gas ovens in Auschwitz. Irving is facing 20 years in the pokey if found guilty. He was already banned from entering Austria, Germany,

free? Is free speech confined to causes with which we agree? As someone wrote, “the unpopular and odious have their rights as well.”

When David Irving was refused entry into New Zealand on the grounds that he had been deported from Canada in 1992, a Kiwi Green Party spokesman said, “His fatally flawed analysis has been rubbished in open debate. Banning him only gives him publicity. His deportation from Canada is irrelevant. What next: are we going to ban Salman Rushdie because Iran doesn’t like him?”

No free speech for fascists is a no-no. Fascists, communists, even vegetarians should be allowed to speak—at least in free countries, which are becoming fewer and fewer. ■

We Hate to Say We Told You So...

October 7, 2002

“Though U.S. forces could quickly defeat Iraq’s regular army in the field, there is a high risk of prolonged urban guerilla warfare and great numbers of civilian casualties.”

October 7, 2002

“Once in Baghdad, how do we get out? ... To destroy Saddam’s weapons, to democratize, defend, and hold Iraq together, U.S. troops will be tied down for decades.”

October 21, 2002

“... the administration really does not know whether there is a clear and imminent threat from Iraq, cannot prove that one exists, and resists proposals for finding out because the answer might undermine its plans for war.”

October 21, 2002

“As one senior Ba’ath party official said to me, ‘When the Americans say there will be dancing in the streets if Saddam is toppled, they are simply reading from a book they have written themselves.’”

December 2, 2002

“Wolfowitz presents Chalabi’s raw intelligence as fact. His boss Rumsfeld accepts the same unfiltered data and presents it with equal confidence in the more powerful Principals Committee. Vice President Cheney and his chief of staff I. Lewis Libby, another Wolfowitz protégé, lap it up, and the National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice lacks the personal confidence to challenge the formidable Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz axis.”

December 16, 2002

“There is no reason to think that fighting in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities will be a cakewalk.”

February 24, 2003

“Muslim extremists who sympathize with al-Qaeda but are not terrorists tell European journalists they are hoping the U.S. invades Iraq. ‘This will demonstrate once again that Muslims are being targeted and thus will allow them to rally Muslims to their point of view and recruit new militants,’ said leftist Algerian author and journalist Mohamed Sifaoui.”

February 24, 2003

“All Western European intelligence services... now agree that an invasion of Iraq would be not only a distraction from the war on terror but a catalytic agent for would-be jihadi terrorists from all over the Muslim world and from Muslim communities in the West.”

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